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FICTION WEEKLY

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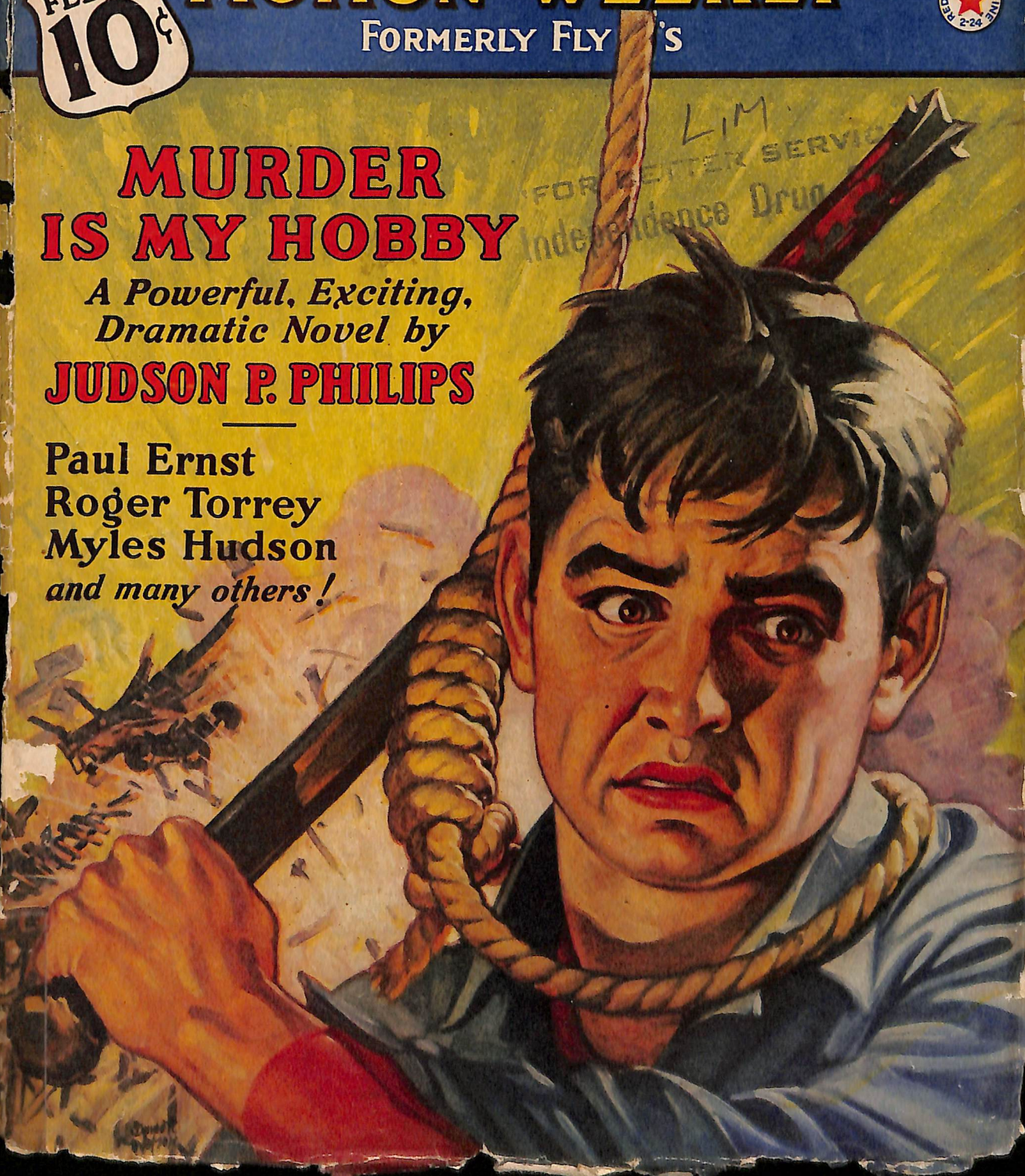


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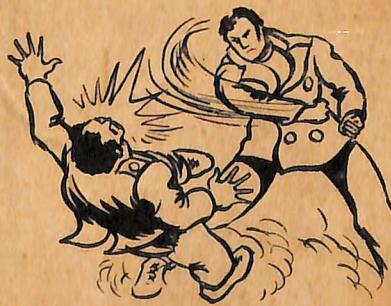
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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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VOLUME 135

February 24, 1940

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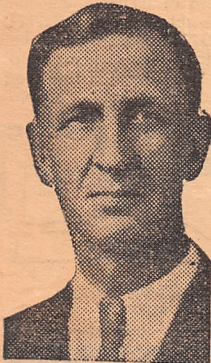
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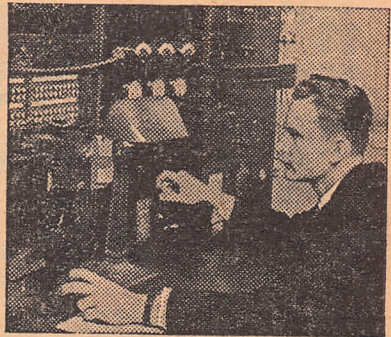
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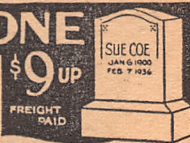
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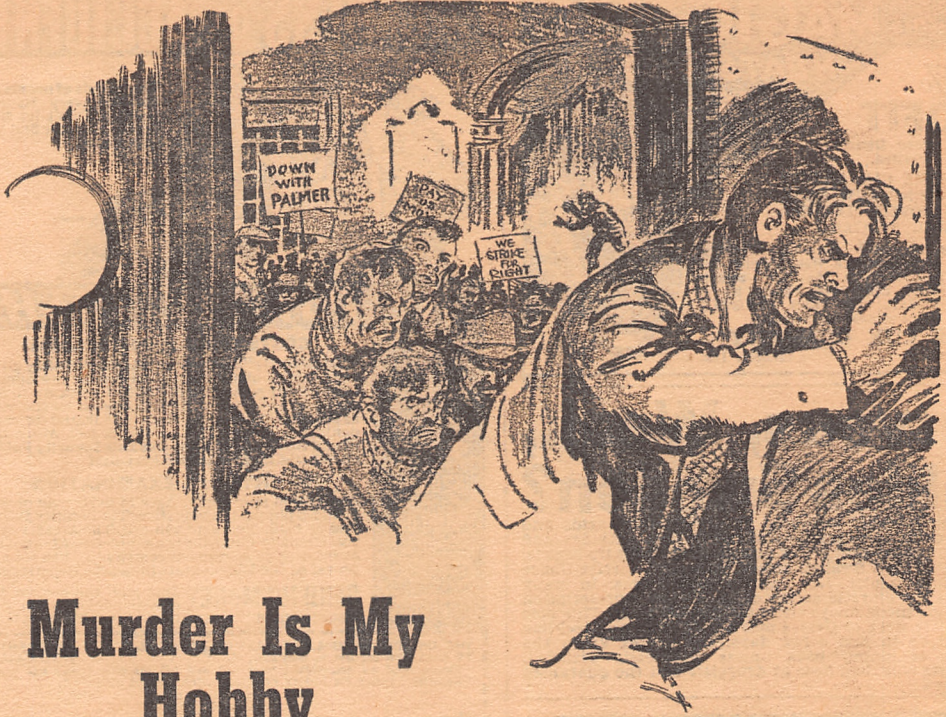
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Murder Is My Hobby

CHAPTER I

Pearl-handled Josephine

THE door of the apartment opened about six or eight inches, and there it was checked by one of those safety chains. A girl, who I assumed was Miss Kay Parrish, since this was her place, looked out at me. Ordinarily I would have dwelt with satisfaction on the decidedly lovely curve of her throat, on her wide generous mouth, smooth and red, on her golden hair which curled back from a high, intelligent forehead. Two things kept me from considering these assets at all. One was the flinty hardness in her hazel eyes. The other was a small, pearl-handled revolver which was aimed directly at my chest.

"What do you want?" she asked. It might have been a pleasant voice, if it

hadn't been as frigid as an arctic wind.

"Miss Parrish?"

"Yes."

"I want to talk to you."

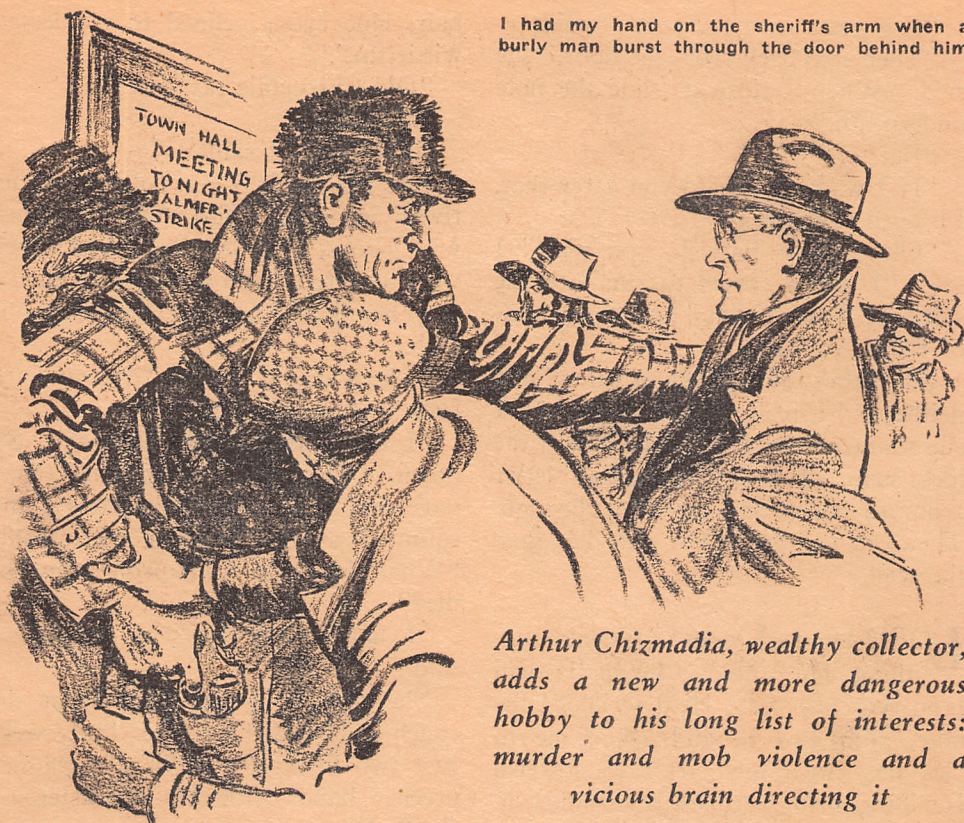
"Talk, then," said Miss Parrish.

I hoped my laugh sounded casual. "Look, I'm not a mad upholsterer, and I'm not selling magazine subscriptions. Does that give me a chance for my life?"

She didn't crack a smile, or bat an eyelid. "You've got ten seconds in which to say what you have to say, my friend."

"Whoa! Wait a minute," I said. I was trying to give her a frank, open look but my eyes kept flicking down. The round black barrel of the gun was steady as a rock. "This reception has kind of taken my breath away, Miss Parrish."

I had my hand on the sheriff's arm when a burly man burst through the door behind him



Arthur Chizmadia, wealthy collector, adds a new and more dangerous hobby to his long list of interests: murder and mob violence and a vicious brain directing it

A Magnificent New Novel By Judson Philips

"Has it?"

"Let's take it easy. My name is Sullivan . . . Barry Sullivan."

"Your ten seconds are up, Mr. Sullivan," she said. She started to close the door.

"Wait, Miss Parrish! Have you ever heard of Arthur Chizmadia?"

She hesitated. "Yes, I've heard of him. He's a millionaire collector."

"Right," I said. "I'm his secretary. He sent me here to see you."

"What does he want?"

"He wants to talk to you," I said.

"Then why isn't he here?"

"Because he wants you to come to his place."

"Isn't that sweet of him. Good-bye, Mr. Sullivan!"

I stuck my foot in the bottom of the door and I thought she'd broken every bone in it as she tried to jam the door shut.

"Mr. Sullivan . . . if that's your name . . . this gun is loaded and I haven't any compunctions about using it."

"Have a heart, lady," I said. I was still trying to preserve the light touch. "Chizmadia's going to be pretty sore at me if I don't at least deliver his message." I reached for the note in my inside pocket.

"Keep your hands in sight!" said Miss Parrish, sharply.

"I've got a note for you," I said.

"Then step back from the door," she said. "When I close it, slide the note underneath."

"But. . ."

"If I want to talk to you after that, I'll open it again."

"Okay, Miss Parrish, you win!" I said. "I didn't expect to run into the spirit of Annie Oakley two blocks east of Fifth Avenue."

She didn't think that was funny, and neither did I, really. As I stepped back she slammed the door and I heard the lock snap. I took Chizmadia's letter from my pocket and shoved it through. Then I lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall.

LORD knows I hadn't expected anything like this. Chizmadia had been very offhand. He'd scribbled the note, addressed it, and asked me to play messenger boy. "If Miss Parrish is willing, bring her back here with you. I want to talk to her." I'd asked who was she and he'd told me she was a newspaper woman. That was the sum total of my knowledge.

"Mr. Sullivan!" The girl was calling to me through the closed door.

"Hello," I said.

"Wait!" I heard her heels clicking away along the floor inside.

I guess I must have waited five minutes or more before I heard her returning. The bolt was unfastened, the chain released, and Miss Parrish, without her gun, opened the door.

"Come in," she said.

"Is it safe?" I asked.

For the first time she smiled, very faintly. "You'll have to run your own risks, Mr. Sullivan. I telephoned Mr. Chizmadia's home and got a description of you. It seems to check . . . 'handsome young Irishman, dark curly

hair, blue eyes, inclined to ponderous witticisms'."

"Did Chizmadia say that?"

"Verbatim."

"The heel," I said.

She led me into a small but attractive living room. The walls were lined with books, and the chairs and couch were covered with a bright chintz. I saw her gun lying on the telephone table.

"The point is," I said, "do you come back with me or not?"

"I don't know, Mr. Sullivan. Sit down. Cigarette?" Her hazel eyes narrowed as she lit one for herself and squinted at me through the smoke. "What does Mr. Chizmadia want of me?"

"I haven't the foggiest notion," I said.

She picked up his note from the couch and handed it to me. There were just two lines written in Chizmadia's precise hand with its characteristic Greek E's.

My dear Miss Parrish:

From your recent articles in the *Gazette* I gather you are interested in fair play. So am I. It might be to our mutual advantage to talk it over.

Arthur Chizmadia.

"Well?" said Miss Parrish.

I grinned at her. "You've got me," I said. "All he told me was to deliver that note and bring you back with me if I could."

"Does Mr. Chizmadia have any interests outside his collecting?" she asked.

"Not that I know of," I told her. "I assumed you had something, or information about something, he wanted to buy."

"I see."

"You must set a high value by it,

whatever it is," I said, "since you protect it with a gun."

"What I was protecting with that gun I value very highly indeed, Mr. Sullivan," she said. "My life!"

That stopped me. She sat on the edge of the couch, looking at the note. "My recent articles in the *Gazette* have had to do with a strike at Palmer, Vermont . . . marble workers. Mr. Chizmadia isn't by any chance one of those parlor radicals who interests himself at a distance in the cause of labor?"

"God forbid!" I said.

She crushed out her half-smoked cigarette in a copper ash tray. "Well, I'll go with you, Mr. Sullivan, I'm curious . . . and I'm getting claustrophobia sitting here waiting for something to happen."

"Look," I said, "if you're in danger, why don't you notify the police?"

"Because, Mr. Sullivan, I don't know exactly who it is I'm afraid of."

* * *

"If you don't mind," Kay Parrish said, "we won't take this one. I'd rather hail one that's cruising." She was referring to the taxi which had instantly pulled to the curb as we came out of her apartment building.

We picked one up on Park Avenue and I gave the driver Chizmadia's address. Kay Parrish watched through the little round rear window till we had gone several blocks. Then she settled back with a sigh.

"Seems to be all right," she said.

"What is there about taxis?" I asked.

"One tried to take me places I didn't want to go yesterday," she said. "Fortunately I had Josephine with me."

"Josephine?"

"Pearl-handled Josephine," she said, tapping her handbag. "I broke the glass partition and stuck Josephine in the back of the driver's neck. He became

convinced that sooner or later he would have to slow down and that I would then let him have it. I might not be so lucky again."

"What's the game?" I said. "Mobsters don't run around knocking off newspapers reporters. It's too dangerous."

"Apparently this mob does," she said.

"Who are they?"

She gave me a quick glance from under the brim of her hat. "Suppose we leave that till I see Mr. Chizmadia. Just what sort of a man is your employer?"

"He's a screwball," I said. "Only if anybody else says that they've got to smile."

"Why a screwball?"

I shrugged. "His fortune is estimated in eight figures, but something eats him inside . . . a kind of restlessness. He's spent thirty years of his forty-five trying to find a satisfying hobby. He's collected everything there is to collect. I even left off cataloguing bed quilts to come fetch you. He's financed expeditions to the North Pole and into the Central American jungles. He works up a great enthusiasm for each thing in turn . . . and then it dies."

"And you're his secretary?"

"Secretary, bodyguard, companion, court jester!"

"Bodyguard?"

"A guy with that much dough is always being annoyed," I said.

"And you say he finances things that he gets interested in?"

"Yes."

Kay Parrish frowned and it made her nose wrinkle. I liked it. "Maybe I'm sorry I came," she said.

CHIZMADIA rose from behind his desk in the study as I ushered Kay Parrish in. He is tall and stoop shouldered, with patches of grey in his black

hair at the temples. His eyes are an indescribably bright blue and have a way of staring at you through his gold-rimmed spectacles without blinking.

"It was good of you to come, Miss Parrish," he said. He speaks with a quiet dignity which has always reminded me of the headmaster of the school I attended as a kid.

"I was curious," said Kay Parrish.

"I hoped you would be. Please sit down. Is it too early in the morning for a drink . . . a touch of sherry perhaps?" The girl shook her head. "Then we can get down to cases."

"What cases, Mr. Chizmadia?"

He leaned back in his chair, crossing his neat grey flannel knees. "I've been reading your articles about the strike which is disrupting the Palmer Marble Company, in Palmer, Vermont."

"Have you?"

"Yes. I found them very instructive."

"Are you a student of labor problems, Mr. Chizmadia?"

"No," he said.

"Then why are you interested?"

"Because you have intimated that this is not a legitimate strike . . . that someone is in fact attempting to drive Vincent Palmer, owner of the company, out of business by organized terrorism."

"You have read the articles very thoroughly," Kay Parrish said.

"Is what you say true?"

"It is my opinion."

"Evidence?" Chizmadia's tone was crisp and businesslike.

Kay Parrish was silent, studying him. "Why do you want to know?"

"Why do you hesitate to tell me?" Chizmadia countered, with a faint smile.

"Mr. Chizmadia, yesterday somebody tried to kidnap me here in New York. Last night, as I was about to cross the

street, somebody pushed me violently off the curb in front of a truck. It was a miracle I wasn't killed. Too many people are interested in my opinions . . . and too many people don't like them. I think, before we continue this conversation, I would like to know what possible interest you can have in the strike at Palmer Marble."

"That's a fair question," said Chizmadia. "I know Vincent Palmer . . . have known him for years. We were fraternity brothers in college, although he was fifteen years ahead of me. He used to come back for commencement and reunions." Chizmadia's smile widened. "We called him 'Skinny', and he had a very loud tenor voice which was admirable for group singing. I have always been fond of him."

"And so?"

"One of my hobbies, Miss Parrish, is to fight to the last ditch for a friend of mine who is the victim of persecution. I don't like the things you've been hinting at in your articles. I don't like them at all. If Skinny Palmer is in a real jam I mean to help him!"

Kay Parrish smoked for a moment over that. Then she drew a deep breath. "All right. You asked for it . . . here it is. Ten days in Palmer showed me that the strike is a personal attack on Vincent Palmer. I haven't any legal proof, but you can judge how serious the men behind it are by their efforts to shut me up."

"Why do they want to force him out of business?"

"There doesn't seem to be any reason, Mr. Chizmadia. It can't be a competitor because there is no marble business. It's been shot for months. Palmer's company's running at a loss."

"Hmm," said Chizmadia. "And it's not union agitation as all the other papers say?"

"No. Vincent Palmer treats his workmen like friends. He pays them good wages. Ten months ago he had to make a reduction or go bankrupt, but he didn't fire a man. Actually with no business, anything he paid them was a handout. It was quixotically generous. Yet the men struck for a return to their original wages. And what did Palmer do? He met their demands, although he showed their committee his books to prove that he was operating at a loss."

"Then why are they still striking?"

BECAUSE when Mr. Palmer agreed, they twice found new obstacles to peace, made more outrageous demands. That's where it stands now."

"It doesn't make sense," said Chizmadia.

"It does if you interpret it my way. I've talked to hundreds of workers . . . the native Vermonsters. They are upset and indignant. They think Palmer has been swell. They want to go back to work. They were satisfied before the first strike. They knew the state of the business and they thought they were getting a break."

"Then why . . .?"

"About fifty per cent of the workers are Polish," the girl said. "They are ignorant . . . most of them don't speak English. Into this group have moved professional agitators. Not from the national labor bodies, mind you. They disclaim all knowledge of the agitators and the strike itself. They've been employed privately by whoever is putting the screws on Palmer. These agitators stir the foreign contingent to violence whenever peace seems in the offing. The old line employees are with Palmer, but they're afraid. Houses have burned. Men have been beaten up."

Chizmadia didn't say anything.

"They've gone a long way toward getting public opinion on their side," continued the girl. "They've thrown up a smoke screen of imagined injustices to the workers. All of the radical newspaper columnists, like Roderick Fern, have been shouting their heads off about 'vicious capitalism'. It's bunk. I have tried to convey the real truth . . . and they are out to get me."

"They', Miss Parrish? You keep saying 'they'?"

"A figure of speech," she said wearily. "I've told you all I know, Mr. Chizmadia."

Chizmadia lit a cigarette thoughtfully. He was quiet for a long time. Then he said, "I think a trip to Palmer, Vermont, is indicated, Barry."

"But what do you propose to do, Mr. Chizmadia? What can you do?" Kay Parrish asked.

"I don't know," he said. "A little probing . . . a little fighting perhaps."

She shook her head. "Go up there as Vincent Palmer's friend and you're licked before you start. One side will fight you openly . . . the other will be afraid to help."

Chizmadia smiled. "But I shan't go as Palmer's friend," he said. "I ran into Fern and Harold Bloom, the artist, at lunch today. They tried to persuade me that I should interest myself in the cause . . . financially."

"The rats!" said Kay Parrish, angrily.

"Very aptly put," Chizmadia drawled. "But I shall go as their friend, none the less."

She looked at Chizmadia and her face was bright with enthusiasm. "Perfect," she said. "They're very nice to Fern and his cohorts. Gets them good publicity. There's a through train tomorrow at 8:06 in the morning. I'm taking it myself."

"Then Barry and I will be fellow travelers," Chizmadia said.

I couldn't hold in my five cents' worth any longer. "You're going off the deep end," I told him. "This kind of thing isn't up your alley."

"But we shall go, Barry, all the same," he said. His eyes were frosty, but I realized he wasn't angry with me. He was thinking about his friend Skinny with the tenor voice, and what was happening to him.

"As for you," I said to Kay Parrish, "you're plain crazy. You're playing right into their hands. You're going back where they can't miss cooking your goose."

"It's the safest place in the world for me," said Kay Parrish. "If a newspaper woman got knocked off in New York, it wouldn't draw space on page twenty. But if it happened up there, it would point directly at them. No, I'm safer there than anywhere else."

"Except in this house," said Chizmadia. "I think, in view of the attempts that have been made, Miss Parrish, it would be wise if you were to accept our hospitality until train time tomorrow. Barry can go back to your apartment for anything you need."

Kay glanced away and for a moment I saw her lips tremble. It was the only indication of the strain she'd been under.

"Thank you," she said. "Playing hide and seek with the boys is . . . a trifle nerve wracking."

CHAPTER II

Thumb-Nail Sketches

KAY PARRISH was frowning as she looked out the train window. I thought the frown was evoked by the beautiful city of Troy, New York,

which is certainly a hell hole . . . at least the part you see from the train. But I was wrong.

"I'm worried about Mr. Chizmadia, Barry," she said. We had long since gotten past the Miss Parrish-Mr. Sullivan stage.

"Don't," I said.

"It's swell to want to fight for a friend . . . but this isn't his kind of a fight."

"There's nothing you can do about it," I said. "He's as stubborn as all the Missouri mules in captivity."

We were sitting facing each other in green plush Pullman chairs. Chizmadia had retired to the smoker where he was going over some notes Kay had given him.

"He won't be able to keep his real reason for coming to Palmer to himself long. And Vreeland doesn't play nicely, Barry."

"Vreeland?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Well, he seems to run the show. He's a smoothie . . . short, dark, with a waxed mustache and eyes as black and shiny as marbles. He's a complete outsider who turned up most opportunely and with plenty of dough to direct the operations of the strikers. His two lieutenants are workers. One of them, Osmanski, is an old-timer . . . a channeling machine operator. He's a Pole, and he can wrap the Polish workers around his little finger. He's big and strong and affable . . . always laughing and kidding. But I think he would laugh and kid while he cut the heart out of his grandmother."

"A nice rogues' gallery," I said.

Kay's face clouded. "The other is a big red-headed ox named Al McPhail. He's the rubbing bed foreman. He's been with the company about ten months, and I hear he came highly recommended. But Vreeland didn't

have any trouble turning him into his personal strong-arm boy. And he likes the ladies."

"You?" I asked, looking down at her clenched hands.

She nodded.

"Mr. McPhail and I are liable to tangle in a hurry," I said.

"No, Barry, please," she said. "You're not equipped to meet his kind of crude rough stuff. Neither you, nor Chizmadia."

"No?" I said.

"No," she said. "You won't even have the advantage of the law on your side. There are one or two State Troopers hanging around, supposedly to keep order, under a hard-bitten sergeant named Potter who is, I think, strictly on the level. But there aren't enough of them to cope with the situation and with the local sheriff!"

"What about him?"

"He reminds me of a movie villain, Barry. Tall and wiry with a cruel mouth and little slits of eyes. Only Sheriff Banta isn't acting. He and his armed deputies are openly with the trouble makers. They preserve order by clapping anyone who says anything good about Palmer into jail."

"Look," I said, "I've never seen Chizmadia in this kind of a situation, so I can't quote you chapter and verse on how he'll behave. But I can promise you he'll be more than adequate. He always is. As for myself . . . Well, before I took this cockeyed job, I was an engineer . . . construction. I'm going to enjoy handling tough guys again."

"I hope you're right, Barry," she said, but she sounded unconvinced.

"Forget about it," I said. "Playing a sure thing is no fun. How would you like to hear the story of my life?" That got a smile, so as our train wormed its way northward into the

bleak snow-covered country I gave out.

I must have been going strong for a hell of a while because when Chizmadia stopped me with a touch on the shoulder he said:

"We're due in Palmer in fifteen minutes, Barry. You'd better start seeing to our bags."

"I'll continue with this epic at some future date," I said to Kay.

AND just then the train came to a lurching, unexpected stop. There wasn't any station or anything. We were in open country. The Pullman conductor stepped out on the car platform and I heard someone talking to him in an excited voice.

"See what it is, Barry," Chizmadia said.

I went forward. A trackwalker of some kind was gesticulating when I got there.

". . . and blew the be-whoozis out of her!" he was saying.

"Out of what?" I asked.

"Someone has dynamited the railroad bridge up ahead," the conductor said. "Looks like we can't go any further."

"How far is it from here to Palmer?" I asked.

"Couple of miles."

I reported back to Chizmadia. He took the news without any visible sign of emotion. "I believe you packed some galoshes in my bag, Barry. Get them out, like a good fellow."

"Galoshes!" I said.

"It looks as though we would have to walk," he said. "You can make arrangements with the train people to have our luggage sent on by automobile from the last town. We'll pick them up at the Palmer depot later."

That was that. By the time I'd arranged things with the conductor, Chiz-

madia and Kay were already out of the car and walking beside the tracks. Up ahead I could see a coil of smoke rising from the remains of a trestle bridge that had certainly had hell knocked out of it. There were a crowd of men beyond the engine, staring. As we approached a man detached himself from the crowd and came toward us. He was a giant. The outsize earmuffs on his fur cap made it look like a football headguard. He had on a leather jacket, corduroy pants, and high laced lumberman's boots with a pair of red woolen socks folded over the tops.

He stopped in front of Chizmadia. His huge shoulders were hunched forward and gorilla-like arms hung at his sides. He was balanced on the balls of his feet, and I recognized the characteristic pose of a fighter who's ready to throw a punch with either hand. He looked Chizmadia over from head to foot with insolent, topaz-colored eyes.

"Going somewhere, Mac?"

Chizmadia surveyed him mildly, and then glanced around him as if searching for someone whose name might be Mac.

"Are you by any chance addressing me?" he asked.

"You've guessed right the first time," the big guy said. I moved up so I was standing right behind my boss.

"Not that I can conceive of how it's your business," Chizmadia said, in his polite way, "but I am going to Palmer. And since this seems to be as far as the train goes I am going to walk, unless you can suggest some means of transportation."

"What do you want in Palmer?" The topaz eyes hardened.

"Listen, wise guy," I said, "this is still America, and we don't have to answer questions from any self-appointed Gestapo."

Have you ever seen a fighter measure the distance with his eyes for a knock-out punch? That's the way that big guy looked at me. And then Kay Parrish spoke up, coolly.

"Good afternoon, MacPhail. Mr. Chizmadia and Mr. Sullivan are friends of mine."

MacPhail, eh? So this was the guy who liked the ladies . . . particularly Kay! I could feel my fists knotting up.

"Hi, babe," MacPhail said. "Didn't see you. Are these members of the press?"

Kay was about to answer when Chizmadia cut in. He sounded like a querulous old man. It was a swell act.

"All this delay is very annoying. Surely you've heard of me, MacPhail. Arthur Chizmadia! I have come up here to look over this situation, and if things are as they have been painted to me by my friends Roderick Fern and Harold Bloom, I shall put my entire fortune at the disposal of the unfortunate marble workers."

A broad grin spread over MacPhail's face. "So this is some of the intellectual crowd?"

"I detest the word 'intellectual'," said Chizmadia, in the same crochety voice. "I am a business man."

"Well, why didn't you say so, pal?" MacPhail chuckled. "My car's right here. I can drive you into Palmer. Where's your luggage?"

"We've arranged to have it shipped to us from the last town when the train goes back," Chizmadia said.

"No need of that," said MacPhail. "I'll get it for you now." He swung up onto the platform and thumped into the car.

Kay smiled at Chizmadia. "I'm beginning to be very glad you've come, Mr. Chizmadia," she said.

CHAPTER III

Empty Streets

MACPHAIL climbed down out of the Pullman with our bags tucked under his long arms. I didn't offer to help and he didn't seem to notice.

"Car's down there by the road," he said.

We waded through the snow to a mud-spattered Ford sedan that was pulled up on the edge of the ditch. MacPhail piled in the baggage and maneuvered it so that Chizmadia and I sat in back and Kay was in front with him. As we started toward Palmer we got a closeup of the sabotaged bridge.

"What happened?" Kay asked MacPhail.

The big redhead laughed. "They tried to run a flat car of marble down from Tunnel Quarry," he said. "Somebody didn't like the idea. They blew up the bridge just when the flat car was in the middle of it."

"Engine too?" Chizmadia asked.

"No engine," said MacPhail. "It's downgrade all the way from the quarry. These flats come down on their own with just a brakeman."

"What happened to him?" Kay asked.

MacPhail chuckled again. "If they want to hold a funeral for him, they'll have to do it in sections!"

"How dreadful!" Kay said.

"His own fault," MacPhail shrugged. "Palmer's been warned not to move anything. If someone was sucker enough to try to take out a flat car for him, he got what was coming."

Chizmadia seemed to be examining the back of MacPhail's head. "I take it, then, that the bridge had been mined, else it couldn't have been destroyed so opportunely?"

I saw MacPhail's eyes glance up at the car mirror to get a look at Chizmadia's face. It couldn't have told him anything because it was as expressionless as a mask. "When the worm turns," said MacPhail, "you can't tell what he'll do. A lot of the boys here are pretty sore at Vincent Palmer and at anyone else who tries to string along with him."

"I suppose you guys think the world owes you a living," I said.

The topaz eyes shifted in the mirror for an instant. Then they shifted back to the road and I watched MacPhail's lips tighten. "Maybe I ought to give you a piece of advice, pal," he said. "If you don't happen to agree with what's going on here, it might be smart for you to turn around and go right back to the city. Palmer may not be healthy for you."

"I've lived through epidemics before," I said. And then I nearly let out a yip because Chizmadia gave me a kick in the shins.

I shut up after that. We were coming into Palmer. Along each side of the highway were rows of little white houses. They were all pretty much alike, but they were freshly painted and they looked neat and clean and cheerful.

As we got into the center of town Kay pointed out a library, a hospital, and a public playground, all of which had been built by Vincent Palmer for his workers.

"Are we being taken to a hotel?" Chizmadia asked.

MacPhail laughed. "The nearest thing to a hotel hereabouts is a ski lodge some twenty miles out of town. If you want to look things over, Mr. Chizmadia, you'll want to be right here. I'm taking you to Mother Carey's boarding house. Good meals . . . well

heated . . . bathrooms. I stay there myself."

"It sounds as if it would do quite nicely," Chizmadia said.

Mrs. Carey was a new type as far as I was concerned. She was a thin, scrawny woman of sixty, with a hard, hatchet-shaped face. It was confusing, because her eyes were kindly.

"Can't take care of you both," she announced, "unless you're willin' to share the same room."

"We can manage that," said Chizmadia.

"Then follow me."

We trekked upstairs after her. It was an old, rambling farmhouse with low ceilings and all the doors hanging crooked. Like so many of those old houses it had sunk on the foundation and nothing in the place was on a level.

MacPhail followed us with the bags. It turned out that Kay was staying at a house a little further down the street but that she took her meals at Mother Carey's. As a matter of fact Chizmadia and I were pleased with the notion of sharing the same room. It meant we could talk together without being obvious about it. Chizmadia said as much when we were left alone.

The first thing that caught his eye as he moved about the room were the quilts folded at the foot of each iron bed.

"But these are magnificent, Barry!" he said. "The Rising Sun design. Very rare. You must remind me to ask Mrs. Carey if she would be willing to part with them."

"I'll remind you," I said. "I'd also like to remind you that we've stumbled into something here! That MacPhail is about as pretty a cutthroat as I've ever seen. Did you notice how he laughed off the death of that brakeman? All in the day's work. Kay told me

about some of his playmates on the way up." I repeated her descriptions of Banta, the sheriff; Vreeland of the wax mustache and the agate eyes; Osmanski, the killer with the sense of humor.

"We didn't expect to discover a Sunday school picnic in progress, Barry," Chizmadia said. He glanced at his watch. "We've time to take a stroll around the village before supper."

We strolled. It was really a hell of a pretty little village, with big maple trees lining each side of the main street. The early winter evening was falling, and lights were popping on in houses. It looked like a Christmas card of winter in the country.

THERE was just one thing I noticed.

There was almost no one on the streets. We saw a woman hurrying into a house with a brown paper bag of groceries, and a couple of kids building a snowman in a front yard. That was all, till we came to the center of town. Here there were a few men gathered on the steps of the post office. They looked at us with suspicion. They weren't foreigners, that was a cinch.

Chizmadia stopped in front of the building and looked up at the men on the porch. They returned his stare in silence.

"Nice evening," Chizmadia said.

One of the men, a tall gangling fellow with an amazing red soup strainer of a mustache, took a pipe out of his mouth and spat in the snow.

"Eh-yah," he said. I took that to be an answer in the affirmative.

"Get's dark rather early now," Chizmadia said.

"Eh-yah."

"Not many people about the streets," Chizmadia wasn't giving up. "With a strike on I should have expected to see

a great many workers hanging around."

The guy with the soup strainer tossed that one around so long I was sure we'd lost, but he changed his mind. "Meetin' at Town Hall," he said. "They's a lot of 'em there. The rest of us kinda draws in our horns. After a meetin' some of the boys is liable to git a mite rough."

"I see," said Chizmadia. "And where is the Town Hall?"

Soup Strainer pointed with the stem of his pipe toward a brick building at the end of the street. Apparently he'd had enough of talking.

"I'm very much obliged to you," Chizmadia said, pleasantly.

"Ain't done nothin' to be thanked fer," said Soup Strainer.

We walked on down the street. As we got closer I heard voices raised in an approving sound. Whoever was addressing the meeting was certainly saying the right things.

Men were clustered at the door of the building as we went up the steps. Instantly our way was blocked by a scarecrow of a guy with narrow eyes and the meanest mouth I ever saw. He had a revolver strapped to a holster on his thigh. I didn't have to be told that this was Banta, the sheriff who looked like a movie heavy.

"Union cards?" he said, sharply.

"I'm sorry," Chizmadia said. "We are not members of any union."

"Then scram," said Banta.

Looking past the sheriff we could see the hall crowded with workmen. On the platform, speaking in a language which I didn't understand but assumed was Polish, was a massive guy in dusty jeans, his face covered with a stubble of black beard. He had very white teeth and he smiled a good deal as he talked.

"I should be vastly interested to ob-

serve the meeting," Chizmadia said to the sheriff.

"And I'd like to run for Miss America," said Banta. "But I can't. So scram . . . and don't be tough about it!" The last was aimed at me.

I thought Chizmadia would put up an argument, but he didn't. I had my hand on the sheriff's gun arm by that time, but before things went any further the man we had first noticed on the platform, delivering a speech, burst through the door behind the sheriff.

"Jest a meenit, Joe." His accent was broadly Slavic. "Ees that Meester Cheesemahdia?" The boss turned. He is always explaining that the 'a' in his name is pronounced as in maple, but he didn't say anything now. He just blinked at the speaker.

"You are welcome, Meester Cheesemahdia. We hope you are goeeng to be our frand! Come in!"

"If Osmanski says it's okay, it's okay," Banta said. "You'll have to stand up in back. There's no seats left."

We stood, and I was grateful. The place seemed to be hermetically sealed except for the door, and it was heavy with the mixed smells of garlic, stable, and sweat. Osmanski mounted the platform and continued with his speech. I figured he was pretty good, because he had that mob of workmen right where he wanted them. They reacted as if he was playing on an instrument. They laughed, they muttered angrily, they shouted defiance. Osmanski's voice had volume when he needed it. It reminded me of listening to Hitler over the radio. Something fanatic about it . . . something that made you a little sick at your stomach.

Chizmadia suddenly made for the door and I followed.

"Come again," Banta said, with a kind of a leer that I guessed was meant

to be a smile. But it missed out.

"Thank you so much." Chizmadia was silent till we were about halfway back to Mother Carey's. "Unless I am a worse judge of character than I imagine, the good Mrs. Carey's dinner will be both plentiful and excellent."

"I can get around it," I said. "What did you think of the spellbinder?"

Chizmadia frowned. "Dangerous, Barry . . . exceedingly dangerous. Not for what he is himself, but for what he is capable of making other men be."

"I don't know what he was saying," I said, "but they ate it up."

"Emotional drivel," he said. He looked at me. "I don't know if I ever told you, Barry, but foreign languages used to be a hobby of mine. I speak six of them quite fluently and have a working knowledge of eight others, dialects included. I am quite at home with Polish."

WHEN we got back to Mrs. Carey's Chizmadia went to our room to clean up for dinner. I headed for the front parlor because I had heard Kay's voice.

When I found her she was the center of a circle of admiring males. Mac-Phail I knew, but the other two were strangers. Kay introduced me.

"This is Mr. Vreeland, Barry, and Dr. Roy Randall. I spoke to you about Mr. Vreeland, coming up on the train," she added, meaningly.

Her description of him had been perfect. He was a sallow, muscular little man with hair that glistened like patent leather and the tips of his mustache waxed to needle points. The pupils of his eyes were unusually small. He was a cut above the other thugs I had encountered so far. He talked like a gentleman, in a low, well-modulated voice. His manner was very correct,

and I could see he rather fancied himself as a beau brummel. His grey flannel suit was plain enough, but he wore a salmon pink shirt, and a black tie with dots that matched the shirt. A handkerchief of the same material peeped from his breast pocket.

"You are Mr. Chizmadia's secretary," he said, acknowledging Kay's introduction. "We are very pleased that he has come to look over the field."

"He'll be glad you're pleased," I said.

Dr. Randall was young, this side of thirty. Kind of a nice-looking, neutral sort of a guy, made a little owlsh by horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Dr. Randall is the only person in Palmer who is still working at his job," Kay said.

"I suppose people get sick, even during a strike," I said.

"Oh, I'm not an M.D., Mr. Sullivan," he said. "Research chemist. I'm head chemist, laboratory superintendent, in fact the entire force of the research department for Palmer Marble."

"What's a chemist got to do with stone cutting?" I asked.

"Always trying to find a use for waste," Randall said. "You'd be surprised at the things that we've already learned to make from marble . . . chicken feed, tooth powder, face powder, rock wool. Then we're always working at methods of coloring it, new ways of cutting and polishing. We're working on a new rubber saw at the moment."

"A rubber saw! For cutting marble?"

"That's right. Sounds scfwey, doesn't it? But it's going to be far superior to the diamond saws we use now."

"Well, I'm damned," I said. "I supposed you used marble for buildings and tombstones and let it go at that."

"You'd be astonished at the ramifica-

tions of the industry," Vreeland said. "That's why," and his voice deepened, "it is so vital that its workers should be treated like human beings. That is why we must go on fighting."

Chizmadia and Mrs. Carey arrived at the same moment. Supper was ready. Kay introduced Chizmadia and then we all headed for the dining room. Chizmadia held back, and gestured to me.

"Someone took the trouble to go through our luggage while we were out," he said.

"What the hell for?" I asked.

He looked at me. "Didn't you bring an automatic in your suitcase, Barry?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's gone," Chizmadia said.

CHAPTER IV

Death at Report Time

WE sat down at the table. Mrs. Carey stood at the head with serving dishes piled around her. There was old-fashioned chicken fricasee with dumplings and golden yellow gravy. On any other occasion I would have given myself up to ecstasy. But I was sore as hell about that automatic being stolen. In the first place, it was one that just suited me . . . had a perfect balance. In the second place, the more I saw of Palmer the less I liked the idea of being around without some protection. With Banta and his deputies officiously sporting side arms it was no time to depend on your bare hands in a jam.

I wondered who could have done it. Mrs. Carey? She had the easiest access to our room, and would have aroused no suspicion if she were bringing towels or something. And why not? MacPhail and Vreeland both lived in the house. She might very

easily be in cahoots with them. It couldn't have been Banta and it couldn't have been Osmanski. We'd known where they were.

While I was stewing over this I heard Vreeland saying to my boss: "You don't know how anxious we are, Mr. Chizmadia, to have people like yourself interested in our fight."

"I propose to make a very careful study of the situation," Chizmadia said.

"You don't have to make a study," said Vreeland. "Stay here a couple of days and the facts become apparent. We're fighting for justice, decent living conditions, wages that guarantee security."

"That seems fair enough," said Chizmadia, blandly.

"And we're going to get 'em!" MacPhail chimed in.

The telephone rang out in the hall and Mrs. Carey went to answer it. Everyone stopped talking, the way they do when someone goes to the phone. You can't help it, even if you want to be polite.

"Yes, he's here," was all Mrs. Carey said. She came back, nodding to Vreeland.

He disappeared into the hall. "Vreeland speaking. . . . What's that? God almighty! Wait a minute." He shut the hall door and we couldn't hear any more. It was quite a while before he came back. When he did, he was nervously twisting the points of his mustache. He handed MacPhail a slip of paper. MacPhail scowled as he read.

"Holy cripes!" he said, and pushed back his chair. Vreeland shook his head vigorously. After a moment MacPhail pulled up his chair to the table. All at once the room was snapping with tension. Vreeland drew a deep breath.

"I was talking about conditions

here," he said. He went on talking about them. Whatever news he'd gotten over the phone was not to be told us.

AFTER dinner Vreeland and MacPhail went off somewhere into a huddle. Dr. Randall and I were settling down to amuse Kay when Chizmadia, who had been peering out the window, gave Dr. Randall a break.

"Barry, it's a magnificent night. I think a stroll out of doors would be enjoyable."

It was an order and I went to get on my things. As soon as we were outside the house Chizmadia explained.

"I want to talk to Vincent Palmer, Barry. I'd just as soon not advertise the fact that I know him. Not yet. His house is on that hill, back of the town. It's not a very long walk, I should judge."

It was almost as bright as daylight, crisp and cold. We crunched briskly along a country road and then up the hill toward the house where Vincent Palmer lived. Approaching the marble entrance gates, we saw the headlights of a car and several men standing in the snow beside it talking. Then, as we reached them, Banta, the sheriff, stepped forward.

"Oh, it's you guys," he said. "What do you want?"

"We want to see Mr. Palmer. Any objections?" I asked.

Banta turned toward the men by the car. "They want to see Mr. Palmer," he said.

"Why not?" one of them said.

"Okay, go ahead and see him," Banta said.

I couldn't figure the point of that conversation. Chizmadia walked up the drive to the house without a word, but his stride had lengthened and I ad-

mit my tongue was hanging out when we got to the front door and rang the bell. It was a big house, and it was brilliantly lit up from top to bottom.

The front door opened and a State Trooper stood there.

"We've come to see Mr. Palmer," Chizmadia said.

The trooper gave us a searching look. Then he said: "In the library . . . first door on the right."

We walked along the white paneled hallway to the door the trooper had indicated.

"The old boy isn't running any risks," I said. "He's certainly got himself protected."

Chizmadia didn't say anything. He opened the door and I followed him into the room. Then I stopped dead, just over the threshold.

Facing us were two State Troopers. They were standing either side of a chair on which sat a man . . . or perhaps I ought to call him a boy because he couldn't have been more than eighteen. This kid was dark and foreign-looking. His face was dead white and if ever I've seen stark terror it was in his brown eyes. His left eye was puffed and swollen, and there was a cut over it from which blood trickled down his cheek.

Then I looked across at another occupant of the library . . . a girl. She was a hell of a pretty girl, with a swell figure. She had on a wine velvet dinner dress, and there was a bright flower in her hair. It was out of place, somehow, because it looked gay. The girl's face was as white as the boy's, with a dazed expression on it like a Zombie. Then I heard Chizmadia's voice, low and filled with horror.

"Skinny!" he said.

I turned to the desk in the far corner of the room. A white-haired man was

leaning forward, his cheek resting on a dark green blotter, both hands spread out on the desk in front of him.

"Skinny!" Chizmadia repeated, but this time his voice was cold and angry.

Vincent Palmer would never sing tenor at fraternity reunions again. A steel hand drill lay on the thick carpet beside his chair. It had been used to smash in his head as though it had been a Hallowe'en pumpkin.

CHAPTER V

Framed!

THE silence that followed was broken presently by a drawling voice from behind us.

"Now you see him, how do you like him?" It was Banta, who must have trailed us up the drive. He and the trooper who had let us into the house were standing in the doorway.

"I let 'em in, Sergeant," said the trooper, "because I figured you'd want to see anyone who was asking for Palmer."

One of the men beside the boy with the bunged-up eye came toward us. He was grizzled, leather-faced, about fifty with chill grey eyes. This, I gathered, was Sergeant Potter, in charge of the troopers.

"Start talking, you two," he said. "What do you want here? Who are you?"

He might not have been there for all the attention he got from Chizmadia, who walked deliberately past him and over to the chair where the girl sat.

"You are Elaine Palmer, aren't you?" he asked gently.

The girl nodded mechanically. My heart did a flip flop as I watched her dazed, horror-struck face.

"You probably don't remember me,"

Chizmadia said, "because the last time I saw you, you were only four years old. Your father brought you to Boston for a college reunion. You sat on the bar in Eddie's Oyster Palace and ate crackers while your father and I struggled with hangovers. You wore a dark blue woolen snow suit with a red toque and red mittens.

The girl looked at him. A flash of recollection came into her eyes. "I remember that," she said. Her voice seemed to come from a long way off. "But I don't remember you."

"My name is Arthur Chizmadia. I was your father's friend. I am your friend."

"Father . . ." She choked and then went on. "Father often spoke of you."

Chizmadia turned on Sergeant Potter. "Is there any reason why Miss Palmer should be forced to remain in this room?"

"But I want to stay," Elaine Palmer said. "As long as . . . as he's here."

Banta and the sergeant were both staring at Chizmadia. The sheriff's eyes were nasty.

"So you were a friend of Palmer's?" he said.

"A close and warm friend," said Chizmadia, and there were icicles hanging from each word.

"That isn't what we were given to understand about you," Banta said.

"It is a matter of the utmost indifference to me what you were given to understand," said Chizmadia. He faced Potter. "Would you mind telling me exactly what has happened here?"

Blue eyes and grey met in a steady stare. It was the sergeant who looked away first. I hadn't expected him to answer, but he did. Perhaps the note of authority in Chizmadia's voice worked on his natural reflexes.

"About three quarters of an hour

ago," Potter said, "Miss Palmer heard somebody yelling bloody murder here in her father's study. She came running in and found Mr. Palmer the way you see him, with that boy standing over him with a steel drill in his hand. She called us immediately. We've just come. We've sent for the doctor, who's the coroner, and an interpreter."

"Interpreter?"

"The boy doesn't speak any English," Potter said. "His name is Ignace Kiev. He's a rubbing bed man in the finishing shop."

"You mean he was here when you arrived?" Chizmadia sounded astonished.

"Sitting in that chair where he is now, like he'd been slugged himself," Potter said.

"How did he get that cut over his eye?"

Potter's jaw stuck out. "I hit him," he said. "I didn't realize he couldn't speak English. I thought he was holding out. Miss Palmer had told about finding him leaning over her father with that drill in his hand."

"What was he doing here?"

"He's been waving this telegram around," said Potter. He took a yellow envelope from his tunic pocket. "I think he's trying to tell us that Bill Henry, down at the depot, sent him up here with it."

"What does the telegram say?" asked Chizmadia.

"I haven't opened it."

"Why not?"

"Why . . . why I didn't figure it had anything to do with . . ."

"Open it!" Chizmadia said, sharply.

Potter hesitated, and I thought he was about to rebel against the boss' high-handed behavior. But he read the telegram and then passed it to Chizmadia. I glanced over his shoulder. It came from New York City.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY. WISH WE
COULD BE WITH YOU. MARY.

"Perfectly ordinary telegram," said Potter. "This kid just went off his trolley. A lot of these Polacks are in a pretty worked-up state just now."

Chizmadia let that pass. He spoke to Elaine Palmer. "So this was your father's birthday, my dear?"

She looked puzzled. "Father's birthday is in August."

"Do you know anyone named Mary?"

"I . . . I know several girls who . . ."

"Anyone named Mary in New York City who would be sending your father a birthday telegram in December when his birthday is in August?"

"I don't understand."

Chizmadia swung back to Potter. "Not such an ordinary telegram," he said. Then before anyone knew what he intended he had picked up the telephone on Palmer's desk. "Give me the Western Union office at the depot."

"Are you going to let this guy ride herd on you?" Banta demanded.

"Keep your shirt on!" Potter snapped.

Suddenly I felt good. Potter didn't like the sheriff any better than I did.

"WESTERN UNION?" Chizmadia had ignored the by-play between the two men. "You sent a boy up to Vincent Palmer's house with a telegram a little while ago. . . . When did you receive that wire? . . . I see . . . Then why such a delay in delivering it? . . . Ah! . . . And how did you happen to select Ignace Kiev to deliver it? . . . I understand. Thank you." He replaced the telephone and turned to Potter.

"That telegram arrived here at four o'clock this afternoon," he said, "but

the sender had specified that it should not be delivered until seven-thirty. There are often instructions like that with birthday or anniversary wires. It seems that Kiev has been the regular delivery boy since the strike."

"So what about it?" said Banta.

He might as well not have been in the room. "Who let the boy into the house?" Chizmadia asked the sergeant.

"No one," said Potter. I thought his manner toward Chizmadia was beginning to have a touch of real respect. "But it's not quite as odd as it sounds. Palmer was on very friendly terms with his employees before the strike. Knew most of 'em by their first names. Anybody, from an office boy up to the highest paid foreman, could come straight to Palmer with any grievance. You see that door over there?" Potter pointed to French windows at the far end of the room opening out onto a terrace. "Well, when any of the boys wanted to talk to Palmer they'd come to that glass door and look in to see if Palmer was here. If he was, they'd just walk in and talk to him."

"And that's what the boy did?"

"That's the way I figure it, since neither Mrs. Wheeler, the housekeeper, nor Miss Palmer let him in, or knew he was here."

Chizmadia lit a cigarette. "Mind if I talk to the boy?" he asked.

"I told you, he doesn't speak English," Potter said.

"That will not be a barrier between us," Chizmadia said. He walked over to Kiev and spoke to him, very gently, in Polish.

You should have seen that kid. At the sound of his own language he went all to pieces. I thought he was going to get down on his knees and kiss Chizmadia's hand. Words poured out of him, with only an occasional quiet ques-

tion from Chizmadia. He gesticulated wildly, wrung his hands, and tears streamed down his face. At last Chizmadia patted him on the shoulder and evidently said something reassuring before coming back to Potter.

"He tells a perfectly straightforward story, Sergeant. He says that at quarter past seven the man at the depot, Henry, gave him that telegram to deliver. He walked up here from the village, and seeing the lights on in this room came around to the terrace door. He'd done that before when delivering telegrams."

"Sounds reasonable enough," admitted Potter.

"He says," Chizmadia continued, "that he saw Palmer at his desk, with his head lying forward on the blotter. He thought he was asleep. He couldn't see the wound from there. He knocked several times on the glass, and when Palmer didn't answer he tried the door. It wasn't locked, so he came in and walked over to the desk. Then he saw that Palmer was dead." Chizmadia paused to inhale on his cigarette. "He saw the drill lying on the carpet. Instinctively he picked it up . . . realized it was the weapon that had been used to murder Palmer, and started to yell for help. Miss Palmer came in, saw him with the drill in his hand, and took up the telephone to call you. He tried to explain to her, but he couldn't make her understand. So he waited."

"That's a hell of a smooth story," said Banta.

"He had plenty of chance to run," said Chizmadia. "Miss Palmer couldn't have kept him here. Why didn't he?"

"Because he's too smart," Banta said. "If he'd run that would have been a dead giveaway. He probably counted on talking his way out of it if anyone was soft-headed enough to believe him."

"Well, he's found someone," said Chizmadia dryly. "I *do* believe him." He turned once more to Elaine Palmer. "Elaine, was it customary for your father to spend this particular time of the evening in his study?"

The girl nodded. She appeared to be getting hold of herself. "We had dinner very late for country people, Mr. Chizmadia. Eight o'clock. The reason was that after closing time each night the foremen and shop people and business department delivered reports to father. He'd have them all by six and he'd spend about two hours going over them. He always did it before dinner, because he said if he tried to work after eating his mind wasn't as active and clear."

"So that it was a regular routine for him to be in this room from six to eight every evening?"

"Yes."

"Even during the strike?"

"Yes, even during the strike," Elaine said, bitterly. "There were reports from workers' committees; sometimes dele-

gations of workers came to see him; sometimes Dr. Randall from the laboratory had a report. He didn't vary his routine."

"Thank you," said Chizmadia. He returned to the sergeant. "That rather clinches it, don't you think?"

Potter looked blank. "Clinches what?"

"Palmer was always here from six to eight. That telegram, which is obviously spurious, was sent from New York with instructions for it to be delivered at seven-thirty. Someone knew that this boy Kiev would bring it here at precisely that time and that he would in all probability come to the terrace door. That's why the telegram was sent."

"You mean. . . ."

"I mean that Ignace Kiev was intended to discover the body and be caught red-handed." Chizmadia's voice was icy, and his eyes shifted to Sheriff Banta's angry face.

"A blind man could see that the boy has been framed."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Old Guy



The hard-eyed youth whirled suddenly and swore with vicious emphasis

By
**Maitland
LeRoy
Osborne**

"**T**HIS is a stick-up old guy," announced the hard-eyed youth, showing the storekeeper a revolver and then replacing it in a side coat pocket. "Don't get funny with me now, old guy, and you won't get hurt. Just hand over that money you got this afternoon and I'll be on my way."

The hard-eyed youth might have been a broker's clerk, or perhaps a college undergraduate—if you noticed only his expensive looking well fitting clothes, his slicked-back hair, his rather elaborately bored expression. Only his movements were a little too jerky and abrupt for entire normality and his voice was tonelessly flat.

Smoke spiraled slowly up from a cigarette which drooped from a corner of his mouth as he leaned against the counter of the little store. He tilted his head slightly to keep the smoke out of his expressionless unwinking eyes.

The storekeeper himself was a spare,

A man never gets too old to handle young squirts who think they're smart

ramrod-straight man with once black hair that was mostly gray. The well worn, carelessly baggy suit that draped his form somehow failed to entirely disguise a faintly military bearing. His eyes were a frosty blue. Once they must have been piercing. He looked somewhat incongruous behind the counter of a store, as if he never really belonged there. He had big hands. Hands that looked as though they could batter the pasty white face of the youth on the other side of the counter into bloody pulp.

But there was a revolver in the young

thug's pocket. He was potentially as dangerous as the most hardened killer. More so, perhaps—because he was unpredictable. The amateur gangster still intent on building up an underworld reputation.

"Why—" the storekeeper said slowly with studied deliberation, "there's only a little small change in the till—maybe a couple of dollars or so—and a few small bills. Hardy enough for you to bother with." There was no discernible trace of excitement in the storekeeper's voice. He was taking the hold-up, it appeared, pretty calmly—almost, you might have thought, as a matter of course.

"We don't have much trade here now since that other store around the corner on the main street opened up. This place used to take in sometimes fifty, or sixty, dollars on a good day—but it don't take in that much money in a week now. We're lucky if we sell ten dollars worth of goods in any one day. As a matter of fact it hardly pays to keep the place open. If it wasn't that—"

His emotionless voice flowed smoothly on. With his calmly considering gaze fixed on the face of the young bandit, the storekeeper seemed, for some doubtless sufficient reason, to be deliberately talking against time.

"Aw! Can the chatter, old guy," the hard-eyed youth impatiently broke in. His flat nostrils flared suddenly. Anger dangerously tinged the edges of his cold, flat voice. "I didn't ask you to tell me the story of your life—and never mind the chicken feed in the till. What I want is that rent money you collected this afternoon. I know you've got it right here in the store, so you'll only be wasting my time if you try to lie out of it—and I don't like to have old guys waste my time. Come on—hand it over!"

He stuck his hand in the pocket of his coat where the revolver was concealed and motioned suggestively.

The big green Brazilian parrot that had been shuffling sideways back and forth on his perch eyed the intruder malevolently. "Hell's bells!" the parrot suddenly

squawked stridently. "Splice the main brace. Lively, lads—lively now!" He cocked his head and preened the sleekly iridescent feathers on his breast importantly.

The hard-eyed youth whirled suddenly and swore with vicious emphasis. "Smart bird, aint you? Maybe you won't be so smart, if I take a notion to wring your neck." He turned again and motioned once more with the hand that was in his side coat pocket.

"The rent money?" The storekeeper's face—in some fashion curiously like the face of an old eagle—held no expression. "Why, I always—"

"Don't tell me you put it in the bank," the hard-eyed youth snarled, impatiently. "It ain't going to do you any good to lie. I was watching you through the window when that woman paid you this afternoon. You go around the first of the month to those four houses, collecting the rent. I know all about it, old guy. Like I know all about a lot of things. And last month you *did* put it in the bank—but this afternoon you were late in getting around, and came back here with the money. And you haven't been out of the store since. So you've got it right here, hid in a crack maybe. You see, I know all about you, old guy. I don't mind letting you know that I'm smart—that's why I never get—why I've only been nabbed a couple of times—and both times I beat the rap.

"I've been keeping an eye on you, old guy, for quite a while. I knew sometime you'd slip—and then I could walk in and collect a little rent money myself. This is the time. Come—hand it over. I've got a date with a classy dame who'll help me spend some of it, and I don't want to keep her waiting. She ain't the kind of dame that likes to be kept waiting."

The parrot cocked his head inquiringly sideways. "Who's a fool now?" he inquired raspingly. "Who's a fool—who's a fool—who's a fool—" he seemed to run down suddenly, discordantly, like a clock the mainspring of which has been abruptly released.

"It's in the safe here, under the counter," the storekeeper told him evenly, "and the safe is locked. It has a combination lock. You see, I have been afraid—"

"Never mind all that." The hard-eyed youth shifted his feet impatiently. "Open it up, and hand me over the money. And no funny business, mind you. Don't keep me waiting any longer, old guy. It ain't exactly healthy for old guys to keep me waiting."

The parrot, sliding along his perch, hiccupped realistically. "Drunk again, you old soak!" he moaned in a shrill falsetto, then relapsed into inarticulate mutterings.

THE storekeeper thoughtfully rubbed the ball of his right thumb along his stubborn jaw. He seemed to be considering. His gaze was still fixed speculatively on the face of the intruder. "I guess you'll have to open the safe yourself," he confessed after a slight hesitation. "It's pretty dark here under the counter, and I can't make out the figures on the dial very well. My eyes are not quite as good as they used to be. I suppose I ought to be getting some new glasses—"

"All right—all right! Can the chatter. I'll open the safe. What's the combination?"

The hard-eyed youth came around the end of the counter and looked at the small cheap safe contemptuously. "Do you call that sardine can a safe?" he asked with a sneer. "What's the combination?"

The storekeeper squinted his eyes in an effort to recall the figures. He shook his head helplessly. "Funny—it's because I so seldom lock it, I guess. I never seem to be able to remember what the combination is. I have to keep it written down on a card. I get the figures all mixed up. Sometimes I have to—"

"For cripes sake—quit your stalling, old guy. Old guys that try to stall with me are apt to get hurt. Where's the card?"

"It's right here in the till—I'll get it for you. I'm not trying to stall. I wouldn't want to get hurt, you know. Here's the card, tucked away in a corner. I'd for-

gotten just where I put it, to tell the truth. Anyway, I think this is it. When I'm a trifle nervous, things sort of dance before my eyes. If you'll wait till I get my glasses—"

The hard-eyed youth snatched the card from his hand. "I'm getting kind of nervous myself, old guy," he snarled, "Old guys that make me nervous sometimes get something to quiet their own nerves. I guess this is the combination, all right. There's nothing but some figures on the card, anyway. You stand right there, where I can keep one eye on you—and don't try to get funny, old guy. You might get hurt if you try to get funny—and that wouldn't be so funny, would it, old guy?"

He crouched on his heels before the safe and began to twirl the dial with nervously supple fingers.

The storekeeper, leaning at ease with one elbow on a showcase, watched the proceedings with interested eyes. There was the faintest suspicion of a smile on his thin lips, but otherwise his face was expressionless.

"Nine — four — eight — seven — three —" The hard-eyed youth was speaking the figures aloud as he worked the combination. "Hear 'em click, old guy," he exulted. "But you wouldn't be able to hear 'em, of course. You ain't smart like me. Well—here it is."

The storekeeper straightened up suddenly in an attitude of strained attention as the bandit swung back the door. There was a loud report—a blinding flash—a strangled cry, as the hard-eyed youth slumped backward to the floor. He lay there quite still, huddled in an inert mass.

The storekeeper permitted his thin-lipped smile to measurably broaden.

"Well—it worked perfectly," he remarked conversationally to the parrot that had emitted a startled squawk of amazement and was now agitatedly shuffling back and forth on its perch with head drawn in and feathers ruffled.

He stooped down and took a small metal case somewhat resembling an old-style hand camera from the interior of

the safe and set it carefully on the counter. He regarded it with a sort of restrained pride.

I'll get the thing patented now—there ought to be a lot of money in it. Williams' safe-breaker's trap—that ought to be a good name for it. And then for a catch-line—Catches 'em alive. Takes their picture and calls the police. And I might never have thought again of working out that old idea of mine, if that other tough young thug hadn't held up this store six months ago. Funny how that sort of thing is sure to be repeated.

The loud, penetrating, banshee-like wail of a police siren stridently rose and fell in the distance, filling the whole street with horrid sound, and presently a prowling car stopped with a squeal of brakes before the door. Two blue uniformed men burst into the store with automatics in their hands.

"They got the alarm at Headquarters and notified us over the two-way radio," the older of the two policemen told him. "There'll be a couple more cars here inside of a minute. That's sure a swell invention that you worked out, Inspector. Where's the bird that set it off? Oh—there he is. He's a pretty guy, isn't he? I guess they didn't have quite so many of these slick looking young thugs in the days while you were still on the force, old timer. He isn't dead, is he?"

The pseudo-storekeeper shook his head. "Just a touch of gas, supposed to render a safe-breaker insensible and allow plenty

of time for the police to show up and gather him in. He'll be all right in an hour, or so. By that time I'll have the film developed and a couple of prints made. It ought to be rather interesting—the expression on his face at the very instant when he swung back the door and sprung the trap."

The two policemen had dragged the unconscious form of the bandit from behind the counter.

"He's so young—and correspondingly foolish," he explained, "that I hesitated just a little at the last minute about using him as a subject for trying out my invention. Even after I'd spent so much time in the last couple of months playing at being a storekeeper while the owner of this place took a vacation at my expense—besides carefully baiting him along to stick me up. If he hadn't rubbed in the 'old guy' stuff quite so much, I might have just slapped him down, taken his gat away from him, and thrown him out."

The policeman who was stooping over to lift the unconscious bandit by the shoulders looked up and grinned.

"Well—I guess you could have done that, all right, Inspector. I happened to overhear the Skipper bragging about you only the other day. He was telling the Commissioner that you're the best instructor in jiu jitsu that the Department has ever had."

The parrot sidled along his perch. He cocked his head knowingly. "Lively," he squawked. "Lively now, lads!"

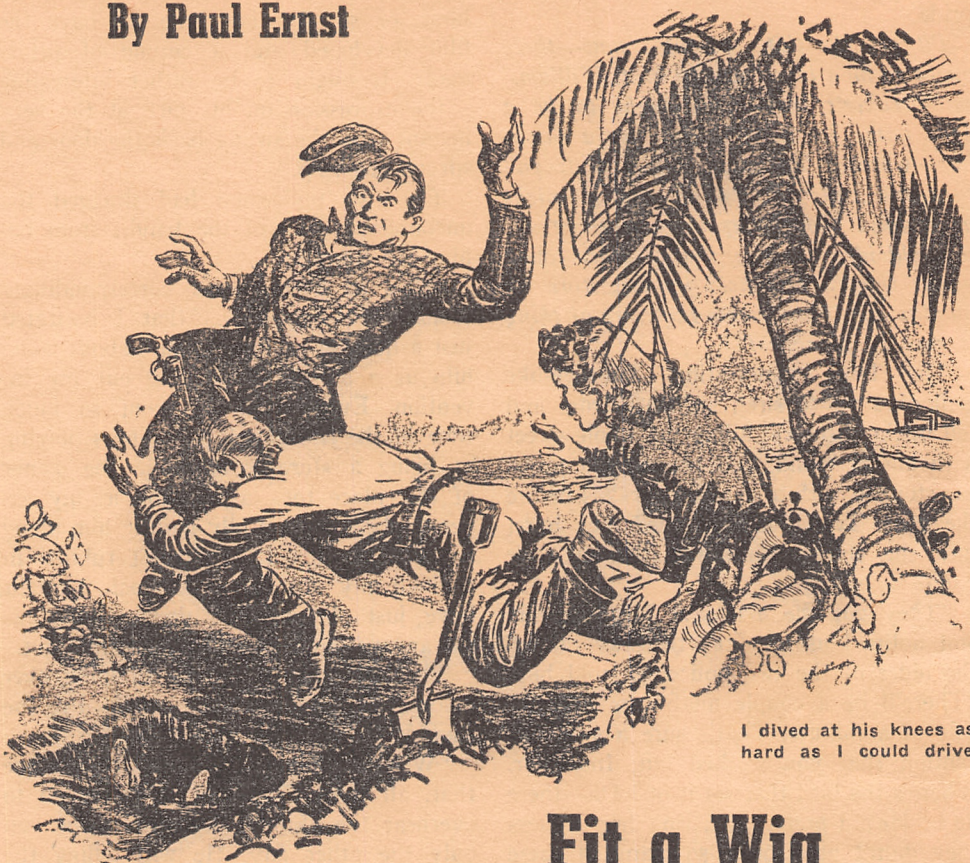
USE **SPEEDWAY** DE LUXE **BLADES**

FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES



A Dramatic Novelet

By Paul Ernst



I dived at his knees as hard as I could drive

Fit a Wig to Murder

I

OF COURSE, Len is crazy. While perusing anything I have to say about her, you must keep that fact firmly in mind.

Lenore Seabright is completely mad. Which makes me a little bit nuts myself for having anything to do with her.

She was being crazier than usual at the moment, I thought. The moment was five or ten minutes of twelve, on a lovely February night in Florida, near Palm Beach. The place was the little summer house, at the back of two

Seabright & Grady, confidential investigations handled publicly and expensively; give us a wig and we'll furnish the corpse

rounded acres comprising the winter estate of Freddie the Groot.

She was staring at a thing she had fished from under one of the summer house benches, in a dark corner.

"You know," she said, looking at it with the wide brown-eyes expression that can make you feel so male and protective, "there's been murder done around here recently. Isn't that dreadful, Link?"

"Murder?" I said.

"Murder," she said. "Look."

I examined the fantastic little thing she held in her small white hand, and sighed. I mean, what's the use of pointing out that a person is maundering when that's all that person ever does anyhow?

Lenore Seabright had been maundering, babbling senselessly, when she first proposed our silly corporation eight months ago. The deuce of it was, I knew it at the time—and yet went along with her. As you tend to do when Lenore looks at you with those big, earnest, little-girl orbs and says wouldn't such-and-such be adorable fun to try.

"Here we are, all graduated from college and everything," was the way she had opened up. We were sitting on our trunks at the station of our university town, waiting for the train to come and take us out into the cold, cruel world. We had become *alumnæ* instead of students. "So now what, Link?"

My name, in case you're tempted to supply it with the nasty prefix, *Miss-*ing, is Lincoln Grady.

"So now *what* what?" I said morosely.

"What do we do for cakes?"

I had been wondering about that myself.

"You know," she murmured, "it's going to be hard to get jobs. You're a graduate civil engineer, which shows a surprising lack of imagination, Link. I mean, of all the things it's hard to get jobs in, that's the very hardest to get jobs in."

"I suppose you picked a snap when you decided to be an interior decorator," I reminded her.

"I guess not," she sighed. "You have to work for years in the interior

decorating business before you get to a place where you can really go to work as an interior decorator. Lots of work . . . I don't like work, Link."

"Nasty habit," I agreed.

"So," said Len, clapping pink palms together like a small girl being shown a new doll that can say Gimme, "I thought up a perfectly grand thing that you and I can do together and make a nice living and with hardly any work at all. Your name suggested it, naturally."

"Name?" I said to the companion of a couple of years spent in the pursuit of collegiate indolence. "It's Grady."

"But of course!" cooed Len. "Don't you see? There's only one thing a man could possibly be with a name like that. A cop."

"Cop?"

"Yes. And I'll be an assistant cop."

I meant to say Huh, but my jaws only flapped.

"We'll be private detectives," she said. "You know, like in movies. We'll trap nasty bandits and apprehend mean old murderers."

I got my voice back enough to laugh. And I looked at her.

LEN is five-feet-two and on the slender side. She wears frilly dresses that make her look like a flower on its way to become part of a corsage. You know, the delicate kind that withers in an hour. Ten days ago she had daintily slipped soap flakes into the fountain in front of the college library on the morning of the day said fountain was to be formally accepted by the university in a nice speech to its donor and several hundred distinguished alumni. But the Dean, knowing that she had done it, and prodded by half a score of large and indignant citizens, had looked into the ethereal wistful-

ness of her face and decided that **she** couldn't be really guilty.

"What would you do," I said, "if you saw a horrid old mouse?"

"Scream, naturally," said Len.

"And if a beetle dropped in your par-fait?"

"Oh, my!" shivered Len.

"And yet you want to play around with murderers and bandits!"

"That's different," Len pointed out. "Isn't it a splendid idea, Link? Seabright and Grady, Investigations. Or just, Investigations, Inc."

"Needless to say," I grunted, "we won't even discuss the matter. I don't relish dying like rats in a trap as a civil engineer in a jungle. But that would be better than starving in an office with you as an imitation private detective."

So we set up as private detectives in an office on Park Avenue costing more per month than an engineer makes in a year. So Len, for a change, turned crazier than ever.

I was beginning to think the world was crazy too. Because we didn't starve. Rich college chums supplied a little business, amused at being solicited for detective work instead of insurance or bonds. And Len had a stroke of luck or intuition to the brain.

She saw a line in the Personal column which, she said airily, was put in by an elderly person with a great deal of money and wanting to contact an heir.

The line said, "Twenty will cool and responsibility must be accepted," so you can see how much sense there was to that. But Len picked up a nephew who had walked hotly out on an uncle, brought the two together, and magnanimously accepted twenty-five hundred dollars for the job. You'd be surprised if I gave the old man's name,

and the number of millions that were the nephew's "responsibility."

Right after that I got two months of guarding a dumb young sap from a smooth young blonde at four hundred a week.

So then, with actually some prospect of paying our Gargantuan rent, Len proposes to scuttle the ship.

"It's awfully cold," she said one afternoon in February's beginning week. "How about going to Florida?"

She looked interestedly at my writhing features.

"You big handsome thing," she said. "I knew you'd approve."

"I do *not* approve!" I yelled. "We're just getting started here. Now you want to up stakes and go to a strange place! Just because it's cold."

"Well, it is cold," she said, patting at her sleek, rust-red hair, which was quite daintily in place, "and why not go to Florida? There are people in Florida, and wherever there are people, there will be crime and things. Isn't it dreadful?"

"This is one time when I absolutely put my foot down," I said. "We have three prospective cases on the fire from sinfully wealthy university friends and their families. We're not going to rocket and leave them."

SO WE went to Florida and settled down on Freddie the Groot, whose full name is Frederick van Allwyne Grootenham and who has a couple dozen spare bedrooms in his Palm Beach place.

We helped Freddie and companions lap drinks, twirl roulette, and play pingpong with platinum paddles while they waited for his Uncle Willie. When Willie got there, from his eternal girl-to-girl investigations of New York's choruses, the bunch would

board the Grootenham yacht—to lap drinks, twirl roulette, and play ping-pong with platinum paddles.

Uncle Willie—Willem Scarsdale Otis Grootenham to you—though even richer than Freddie, was hardly a restraining influence. In the first place he was only five years older than Freddie. In the second place there was that habit of his of wandering off under assumed names with bits of chorus.

For less than three days we help Freddie the Groot wait for his Uncle Willie to join for the cruise. Then my crazy partner picks up this crazy thing and makes her crazy statement:

"There's been murder done recently in these parts."

"Isn't it depressing, Link?" sighed Len, looking more than ever like a fragile flower in her pale green evening frock. "People killing people! And right here in Freddie's summer house, too!"

"Give me that," I snapped, taking from her soft, small hand the thing which, all by itself, had addled her logicless mind into conjuring up a recent murder.

When I'd first seen it, it had looked like an extra-large, extra-hairy, extra-repulsive spider. But it wasn't. It was an extra-small, extra-forlorn-looking wig. Or, I should say toupee.

It didn't cover the palm of my hand; was hardly larger, over all, than a twenty-five-cent piece.

"You see?" said Len, sweetly reasonable. "The man who owns that toupee was recently killed—"

"How do you know it was recently?" I said, calling on reserves of patience I didn't even know I had.

"Because the toupee isn't dragged by exposure. Well, now, this man was killed in or near here and the toupee dropped—"

"Or the murderer was the one who dropped it," I said, trying to keep my face solemn.

"No. If the murderer had dropped it, he would have been back after it at once, and it wouldn't have been here for us to find. But the man who owns it couldn't come back for it because he's dead. You see?"

"Sure," I said. "Let's go and get some of that Czecho-Slovakian beer. Freddie hasn't much left, and there won't be any more imported."

"Nature," said Len, "is the great mother. I suppose Nature looked you over and said, 'Tsk, tsch, this Lincoln Grady person has a head that is figuratively the size of a pin. We must compensate for that.' And by the time she got through with all that compensating you were six feet three, a couple yards wide, and made up of old nails and weathered leather. I'll put it more simply, if possible. A man has been murdered here. You know, killed. We are private detectives. You know, people who go after people who murder people. We should do something about it."

"Just because some dope staggered out here drunk and lost his wig—"

"Toupee," Len said gently. "A very, very small toupee. And there's a trace of some kind of stickum on it. It wouldn't get lost easily."

"—wig," I repeated, "you want to try to fit a murder to it. We'll drop this right now, fuzz-brain."

So next morning we went into the beauty establishment of Florida's snootiest hotel and Len showed the toupee to a man named Dubois, who talked French very precisely in American.

"It is the excessively fine toupee," M. Dubois said. "Observe the very few slightly gray hairs inserted among the

browner shade. Just the few. As of the person young, but the person dissipated. A work of art, veritably."

"Any idea who made it?" I said.

"But no," shrugged Dubois. "How-
ever the police could quite easily—"

"Oh, there's no need of police," said Len, winsomely kicking me in the shin. "Would this cost much?"

"But naturally," said Dubois. "At least eighty-five dollars for the so-small toupee. You observe the artistry with which—"

"Would the owner of this have more than one?"

"Probably not," said Dubois. "The hair it change. A trifle more gray. A tiny more thin. So frequently the new toupee is necessary for the exact match. Therefore, why have two toupees to discard when the new is required?"

"So you see," said Len, outside, "there has been murder done. And right in Freddie the Groot's summer house. Poor Freddie! What a lot of money he's going to have to pay us for straightening the matter out!"

II

WELL, there you are. Or, I should say, where are you?

It's one thing to have a lovely little crackpot like Len announce with bated breath that there has been a murder. It's something else again to produce a corpse.

Len's trouble was that there weren't any stray corpses around. Nobody in or about Freddie the Groot's place had turned up missing recently.

We talked it over after lunch, on our way from the house to the swimming pool.

"Will you forget this goofy idea?" I raved, sotto voce, as we neared the pool.

"Why, Link!" said Len. "Would

you connive at murder by not working to uncover the murderer?"

"But I tell you there hasn't been any—"

I stopped talking, then, because we were getting near enough to the pool to be heard.

Freddie's big pool is about a hundred yards from the house. It is a uniform eight feet in depth. The diving board was at the far end of the pool from the house, set slantwise in a concrete block. The gang were down there.

There was Freddie, big and curly-headed and chubby. There were three young men of the now-you-chase-me type: Dick Masters, Algie Borne, and Toni West. There were four girls—Kathleen Something, Nicky Something, Lucia Something, and Gloria Rapp.

Three were worth looking at. The fourth, Gloria, was quite gorgeous. Almost as lovely as Len, though in a different manner.

This one was close to Freddie. She had stayed close to Freddie constantly. She was engaged to him and didn't intend to permit chiselling. She was olive-skinned, with hair like black silk, and sultry red lips. She was a large and shapely bit who had lately held rather important parts in musical comedy.

"Hello," Gloria called to us. "Why haven't you got swim suits on? Are you busy detecting something?"

"We're trying to detect the swim suits," said Len with her nicest smile, meanwhile running her eyes over large, sleek, suitless areas of Gloria Rapp.

Len didn't like Gloria. I knew it because she was so sweet to her. In tone, at least.

Gloria's eyes took on a look of two marbles whittled out of black ice. Freddie missed it, and grinned vaguely at us.

"Why don't you two cut it out and

get married?" he said, to Len and me.

"Haw!" I said.

"Haw twice, you big apricot," Len shot up at me. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last—"

"What do you hear from Uncle Willie?" I said hastily to Freddie.

Freddie drew a telegram from a bathrobe pocket and waggled it.

"It seems there's a blonde. Or something. Willie wires that he'll be a day or two late."

"Well, it's no hardship waiting," said Katheen Something. "We're having fun here."

I looked at Len and couldn't help it.

"Hate to spoil said fun, folks," I said. "But there has been a murder on the grounds. My partner says so."

There was laughter. Freddie beamed on Len.

"What's the game, Len?"

"The game," I answered for her, "is body, body, who's got the body. Len's trouble is that she can't find any one missing who might be her corpse."

Was Len flustered? You don't know Len.

She fished leisurely in her handbag and brought out the diminutive toupee.

"The man who owned this was killed," she said, looking dainty and feminine and altogether as if she were discussing a new type of lipstick. "Do you know any one who wears toupees, Freddie?"

"Not that small," grinned Freddie. "I know a couple wig-wearers, but nobody that would get steamed up over a bald spot as dinky as the one that toupee could cover."

Gloria Rapp looked at Len with eyes that had changed from black ice to malignant jet.

"You take your work awfully seriously, don't you?" she said in a sympathetic tone. "Are you always seeing

murders in friends' homes, Miss Seabright?"

"Always," said Len. "But often they're the kind no one hangs for." Her bland gaze went to Gloria's pretty but acquisitive lips. "You see, Miss Rapp, murder's a thing some people can get away with constantly."

Freddie was out of this world.

"You two girls are so friendly," he said fondly, "why don't you call each other Len and Gloria?"

I coughed, and Len smiled, and the Rapp looked at fingernails tinted blood red to match her toenails.

"I think it's too thrilling—Len," she said. "You have discovered murder, but no body and no murderer."

SHE poised at the rim of the pool and dove in. I wondered if she was afraid to dive from the springboard, and then saw that the concrete slab in which the board was set looked brand new and fresh. Not hardened enough to take the strain yet, I supposed.

"That's a peculiar springboard arrangement, Freddie," I remarked.

Most boards are merely bolted to the rim of a pool. This, as I've said, was set in a slot in concrete. It looked as if made for elephants.

Freddie showed a skinned spot on his knee.

"The old one broke loose a couple of days ago," he said. "Bolts came out of the tile and sent me tail over appetite. I heard of this more solid arrangement, and had it fixed this way."

"That was just a couple of days ago?" said Len.

"Yeah, why?"

Gloria's sleek head had broken the surface of the water a few seconds before. She said:

"Detectives always ask questions, Freddie darling. That's why."

"Just keeping our hand in," nodded Len. "Freddie, who told you about this 'more solid arrangement'?"

"You mean bolting a springboard in a slot in cement?" said Freddie. "I don't know." He waved his hand vaguely. "Why don't you two come and have a dip?"

We returned to the house to get into our suits.

"That brunette horse with her pink talons in Freddie is capable of murder," said Len, scrambling her metaphors.

"Now that," I said admiringly, "is really shrewd. You don't like somebody. Q. E. D. She's a murderer."

"She's big enough to drag a body from the summer house," Len said reflectively. "And strong enough to slug a man's head into the approximate shape of a cocked hat. Which reminds me, you have a date with me at three-thirty in the ensuing morning at the pool."

"Three-thirty? Pool?" I gaped. I hate myself for that. Nobody else makes me gape. But Len, with her nonsensical remarks does it all the time, and it doesn't make me look particularly bright.

"Three-thirty, pool," nodded Len. "Nice going, Link."

"But—why?"

"Because of the new springboard. Freddie may have heard somewhere of that method of suspending a board, but it's new to me. I've never seen a diving board set in a slanting slot in a concrete slab before. Pretty ponderous, if you ask me."

"So you want to dive off it at half-past three in the morning. Quite understandable, Len."

"Not off it, under it," said Len. "Bring your gun."

"I always carry guns when I dive under springboards," I assured her.

"But I've never yet known exactly why."

"Look," said Len, tripping daintily along beside me and appearing fragile and wistful and feminine. "You want to kill somebody. You have to hide the body. A good way to hide something is to bury it. But that is apt to cause trouble because the ground would show recent disturbance. So you plan to bury your corpse in a place that has been recently disturbed anyway—or is about to be."

"For the love of smoke!" I said. "Are you intimating that somebody made the old springboard break so a new one would be set in cement so you could hide a body under the slab?"

"Something like that," nodded Len.

"In that case you'd be looking, not for a human being, but for a cold-blooded, premeditating devil! A fiend fresh from hell!"

"Melodramatic, but accurate," murmured Len.

I got my sense of humor back, belatedly, and laughed.

"Luck to you on your early morning spade-work, Len."

"You won't help me?" said Len.

"I'll say I won't!"

Len shrugged.

"If I were a killer as foresighted as our killer is," she, "I might set a guard near the place I don't want dug up. But I can get spade and burlap from the greenhouse, and tackle it alone."

We went to our rooms and changed, and returned to the pool. We swam, had cocktails, a riotous dinner. A care-free, merry life till Uncle Willie should snap out of his amorous trance in New York and come down.

There was a message from Uncle Willie when we got in. Freddie made a wry face as he read the telegram the butler handed him.

"Willie wires now that he won't be down at all," he complained. "We're to go on without him."

Kathleen Something cast a knowing glance at Lucia Something.

"What a Romeo is Willie," she said.

Gloria's dark eyebrows went up lazily.

"I've never met Willie, but I've heard about him."

"Never met Willie?" said Kathleen. "And you in the chorus of *The Silent Widow* two years ago? And Willie the angel of that show? Well . . . He's New York's best-dressed little man—and New York's very vainest."

"And that's the lad my doting father decided to make executor of my inheritance till I'm thirty," grinned Freddie. "Not that Willie isn't smart enough, when it comes right down to business."

"I thought you were your own boss," I said to Freddie.

He shrugged. "Oh, Willie doesn't cramp me any."

Len was looking at the Rapp.

"You've never met Uncle Willie—Gloria?" she said. "You must be the only showgirl in New York who hasn't."

"My career took all my time, when I was on the stage," said Gloria. She put her hand on Freddie's arm. "Now, of course, there will be no more career."

"How too sweet," thrilled Len.

Freddie beamed.

"By the way, found your corpse yet, Len?" he said. "Or *was* it a joke?"

"Would you call it a joke if somebody had been murdered on your place, Freddie?"

"Well, not a very amusing joke," said Freddie.

"You'd want it cleared up, of course?"

"Oh, rather!"

"It would be worth something?"

Freddie put his arm around Gloria.

"Any one calling up a murder out of a lost toupee, and then calling up a murderer after it, ought to get at least ten thousand dollars for the feat, I'd say." He guffawed. "Might as well make it a hundred thousand for all the collecting that'll ever be done."

"Ten will do," said Len, dainty and fragile and small. "And you'll find it a bargain, Freddie."

Whereupon she smiled at Gloria Rapp in a way that made my blood run cold, blew a kiss at Freddie, and went on up to her room.

III

AT a quarter after three in the morning, with even the Bacchanalian household of Freddie the Groot silent in slumber, I opened my door and bent an ear down the hall to see if it were deserted.

No soap, I said to Len. Go digging around under springboards in the black of dawn? Nothing doing!

But here I was, ready to participate in her madness.

There were two reasons.

One was a closer examination of the toupee. I had brought along a low-power microscope, pathetically hoping there might be a shred of truth in Len's statement that we could pick up work in Florida as well as in New York. With this instrument I'd taken a long look at the insignificant wisp of hair.

And had found a minute fleck of blood on one of the individual hairs.

It was such a little fleck that it was hard to get excited about it. A man absently scratching his pate, near the dime-sized bald spot covered by such a toupee, could have drawn that much blood and never have felt it.

Nevertheless there was blood on the toupee.

The second reason was—well, damn it. If there was even a slight chance of Len's running her red-brown head into trouble, I wanted to be around.

Hence, I exited at three-twenty in the morning, and jumped a foot and a half when a hand touched my arm at the dark rear door.

"My big, brave partner," whispered Len. "Nerves of steel, that's what."

She put a cool finger over my lips in unfair restraint of profanity, and went out of the house and toward the greenhouse for burlap and a spade.

We sneaked to the pool.

There were all sorts of bushes around the pool, and palm trees like fronded telegraph poles. Len tiptoed beside me with her small hand tight on my arm and her head turning every which way as she sought to see behind all the bushes at once.

"Looking for something?" I said.

"Trouble," she nodded. "As you so charmingly put it, the person who could do the things I think have been done, is inhuman. A devil. That person is quite apt to foresee investigation. I would hate to be caught off guard while investigating."

"Oh, nuts," I said wearily. It wasn't brilliant, but it expressed my feelings precisely.

We went to the far end of the pool. Len eyed the six-foot cement slab into which the springboard was thrust, like a thermometer in thin-lipped mouth.

"Under it?" I whispered, wishing I'd never met Len.

"Under it," she nodded, spreading the burlap.

I dug, putting earth on the burlap so none would be left later to give us away. Len ranged around as I did so, like an alert bird-dog, making sure the shadows cast by nearby shrubbery contained only shadows.

I dug, and felt like a fool and also like a small boy in a graveyard at midnight. It was eerie as hell, there in the darkness, spading in a ragged tunnel that slanted down under the newly laid concrete block.

I dug, and got to a point where the tunnel would have to be made much wider if I wanted to go any deeper. I was going in as far as the spade-handle would reach.

Len had about stopped her ranging around. More and more often she had come to watch my progress. Now I stared at her small, oval face in the dimness.

"Over three feet," I said. Want to go farther?"

Her face expressed such distress that I was almost sorry for her. Not too sorry, though. Do her good to see what happens when you go off halfcocked.

"There's got to be something there, Link," she whispered. "There's too much here for coincidence. Indication of murder, accident to springboard at just the right time, suggestion planted in Freddie's mind of the type of springboard block that would just cover a new grave. There has to be something."

"Well, there isn't. Please, can we go back to bed like sensible folks?"

Len didn't say anything. She held her red upper lip between exasperated white teeth. I filled in the hole, tamping the earth down hard and putting saved sod over it.

Before I was done, Len had a thoughtful look on her face. I have learned to be appalled by that look.

"Funny," she said.

"Sure. What?" I said.

"Putting the diving board at this, the far end of the pool. Usually a diving board is set at the end of a pool nearest the house. Let's have a look at the other end."

I rolled up the burlap and trailed her to the other end of the pool. She played a small flashlight on it

I saw fresh sodding and—in the rim of the pool, two ragged spots filled in with fresh cement. Those would be where bolts had torn out and released a springboard, sending Freddie “tail over appetite.”

“I knew it!” breathed Len. “The board was at this end. When Freddie put up a new one, he set it—for some reason known only to his sub-simian intelligence—at the far end. But our killer had no way of foreseeing that. Dig here, Link.”

I REMOVED some of the new sodding, and dug. I wasn’t quite so sure, now, that Len was crazy. I don’t know why. Nothing tangible had occurred to make me think her ideas had sense. Nevertheless, I couldn’t think of a wise-crack to save my soul.

I think I knew instantly what it was that the tip of my spade struck. There was a slight give to it, yet it resisted a thrust. Not like earth, or stone.

I looked at Len. Her face was paler. “Well, g-go on,” she said.

I went on. A little at a time, I uncovered what had resisted the spade. It wasn’t far down; a bare eight inches under the fresh sodding. But then whoever had put it here hadn’t thought it would need to be far down. The concrete block was supposed to go over it. Then Freddie had put the new springboard at the wrong end of the pool. That was bad, but the killer’s luck had held. The fresh sodding had been assumed by every one to have been laid by some one else to cover the scars in the turf made when the old springboard tore loose.

“Ooooh!” said Len, looking at the exposed object.

It was a foot. A small, dapper foot, but a man’s. The shoe, clogged as it was by damp earth, was excellent. The sock was of fine quality, too.

“C-cover it up,” said Len. “Quick!”

“We can’t do that. We have to find out who it is.”

“I know who it is,” said Len. “Cover it!”

“Who?”

“Uncle Willie, you dope. ‘New York’s best-dressed little man.’ He is a little man, you know. Or was. That was more than a figure of speech.”

I did my confounded gaping act again.

“Willie isn’t on the verge of coming here,” Len said impatiently. “He has come already. And was met in the summer house and murdered. And was buried here. Anybody can send telegrams.”

“But Willie didn’t wear a toupee,” I said. “Freddie said so. Anyway, he said he didn’t know any one wearing a wig that small.”

“Don’t you see? That proves everything. Willie was so vain that he didn’t let even his nephew know he wore a toupee—”

“Put ’em up high, and stand still,” came a voice. It was not my voice and assuredly not Len’s. It was much too bass for that.

I turned, and put the hands up.

A man was facing us with a revolver in his hand. The revolver, I was extremely sorry to see, had a silencer on it. Which meant that it would put the man out not at all to have to fire it.

The man looked as deadly as his silenced gun. He was big, stolid, one of your dangerous and dull-witted gunmen. Dangerous *because* dull-witted: taking orders literally and phlegmatically following them, without imagination and without pity.

"Who are y-you?" chattered Len.

"Whadda you care?" growled the man. "There's a black can out there at the gate. Move. Into it."

"Can't we take this money with us?" said Len, looking as if she didn't get the man's idea at all. You don't take money on a gang ride.

Then I thought, gaping internally if not on the outside, *what* money? Apparently the thought was shared.

"What money?" said the man with the gun, heavy face not quite so stolid.

"There. In that hole," said Len. "W-we were just digging it up when you came."

He had stopped just too far to see into the hole from where he stood. He looked at the hole, then flicked his eyes quickly, warily back to us.

"Money!" He said. "Phooey! Who'd bury money right out in the front lawn?"

"What did you think was here?" said Len.

"Letters," said the man, still flicking his eyes toward the hole and back to us, never giving us a break. "The guy said letters."

"What guy?"

"The guy that told me to hang around here for a few nights. Said letters were buried here for a guy to dig up ten days from now, but somebody might try to get 'em before then. So you try. So you got to get it. Back in the swamp about eighty miles."

"Letters!" said Len. "You believed that?"

"Look, Miss. The can. Black sedan. At the gate. Go and get in it with this overgrown clown beside you."

I had soft rubber for knees. We get in the car and take a bullet apiece, and are driven to the swamp. Or we take the bullets here, are dragged to the car and then taken to the swamp. Either

way it looked to me like we were all through. And I don't like swamps.

"All right," said Len, acting kind of waspish about it. "I understand now. You mean to kill us. You—you lout. So the money won't do us any good after all. And I hope it's found before you get back so it won't do *you* any good, either."

THE man scratched his neck with his left hand. He had mentioned driving eighty miles. It was about four in the morning. You can't drive eighty miles and back, after four, and not expect to find gardeners up and around. And if there was money, in an open hole, sure to be seen . . .

The man edged near the hole.

"I still don't think it's dough," he growled. "It's letters—Hey— It's a stiff—"

Len had done it nicely. Get the man's attention off us just long enough for the male half of Seabright and Grady to take a chance on a long jump. And his eyes were on that neatly shod dead foot for over a second.

I dove, hard and long and flat. And I got there, too, but not without some unexpected resistance.

I'd meant to bang up with my head, catching his wrist behind the gun and knocking it from his hand. The gun flew from his hand, all right, but conked me first. My head hadn't come up in quite the right place.

I flopped around in the grass, trying to see through a cloud of stars, and then managed to get to one knee. But my presence was superfluous. Len had the man's gun. Quite all right, I told myself. Till I saw how she was holding the thing.

Len had the gun in both hands, as if she were strangling it. And it was shaking around till I heard a bleat of

dismay sound out, and realized it was from me.

But if I was bleating, the man on whom the gun was being shakily centered was doing even more.

He was moaning, one continuous, unconscious sound.

According to his looks, this prize thug had skirted around death more than once in his dim-witted criminal career. But I don't think he could ever remember a time when he was as close to it as right now, with that horribly unsteady gun keeping, in the main, a line on his stomach.

"Lady," he said, reaching cautiously up and wiping great drops of sweat from his forehead. "Point that thing some other way! Please! It's loaded!"

"If I d-did," said Len, "you'd attack us, or run away."

"I won't. Honest, I—"

He wiped sweat again. It was running into his eyes. Otherwise I don't think he'd have risked the move.

"And if you ran away I wouldn't be able to ask you anything," said Len.

"If your hand keeps shakin' on that trigger," said the man, with the moan somehow going along under his words like an accompaniment, "you won't be able to ask me anything, either. Go ahead and ask."

"You'll tell the truth?" said Len, looking like a scared child with poppa's .44.

"I'll say! Anything to get that gat off—"

I exclaimed aloud. The fear-paralyzed gunman was beyond such outcries. Len had fumbled till she almost dropped the gun, and had twitched the trigger when she tightened up on it again. The slug had gone into the sod, with a sound like that of a twig breaking as the silenced muzzle spat it out.

"L-lady," said the man, "turn me

over to the cops. Won't you please? Huh, lady? Somebody who knows how to handle a rod? Huh, please?"

"Not till you answer some questions," said Len.

She almost dropped the gun again, then lined it back on the man's quaking stomach. My own stomach felt cold out of sheer sympathy.

"Lady, for Pete's sake—" pleaded the man.

"Who hired you to guard the swimming pool?"

"I don't know . . . Now, now, *please* don't hold that gat so tight. I honest don't know. Some guy called me. He whispered so I couldn't hardly hear him. Didn't give a name. Said he had letters buried at the house end of the Grootenham swimming pool that he didn't want dug up till ten days from now when the right party would call. I was to plug anybody diggin' before then."

"Why didn't you go after us when we dug under that concrete block up there?" demanded Len. The gun wobbled fearsomely.

"If only you'd turn me in to the cops—I didn't do nothin' because the guy didn't say anything about that end of the pool. Just this end."

"You're lying," accused Len. "You'd figure that if letters were so valuable, you'd better dig them up yourself and try to use them somehow."

"The guy said he'd have somebody around to watch *me*!" said the man. "I didn't see nobody, but I didn't wanta take the chance."

"When were you told to start guard?"

"Beginning tonight," said the man, bulging eyes never off the shimmering gun.

"Did you do anything more for the person who phoned?"

"Yeah," said the man. "Three days ago, about this time in the morning. I knocked the bolts of the divin' board loose at this end of the pool."

"And you did all this for love?"

"No lady. I got a grand. Left here for me to pick up. I was to get five grand more if I hadda—hadda take anybody out to the swamp."

Len's hand suddenly seemed much steadier.

"I guess that's all," she said. Her voice seemed steadier too. "Now what, Link?"

"Turn him over to the police, I suppose," I shrugged.

"Yeah," said our prisoner with palsied eagerness. "Do that, lady. That's what you always do in these cases."

"But if we do," I went on, "we tip our hand to the cops, and it looks now as if we have a very great deal to tip, after all."

"It won't matter," said Len. "Take him to the nearest officer and just turn him in for being a suspicious character hanging around the Grootenham house. Before he could crack under questioning, or even get bail, the thing will be over."

"I'd admire to know how you know that," I said acidly. My head was throbbing where it had been socked.

"I know," said Len, "because I'm going in now and wake up the house and finish this off. We've found our corpse, and found an accessory. Now we'll get our murderer."

IV

LEN juggled the telephone cradle and said, "Keep ringing, operator. I know it's late, but some one ought to be home."

I stared sourly at her. She looked like a mischievous child playing practical jokes at half-past four A. M. A

detective? What a laugh that was!

"Who you calling?" I growled. "And why?"

She signalled for me to shut up, and began to talk to some one on the other end of the line. The New York end, I'd had occasion to overhear, for it was the New York operator she had told to keep ringing.

She asked questions that didn't make any sense to me. So she *did* know him. So she *had* been out with him. It sounded like a hen intrigue to me. If so, it was a hell of a time for it.

We were in the deserted library of Freddie's house. I'd come in from turning the terrorized gunman over to a cop, to find Len hanging on the phone.

She hung up, and faced me. Her eyes were softly, wistfully bright. She looked innocently pleased at what she had heard.

"Now we know who did it," she said briskly.

"Do we?" I said. "That's swell. Only it was pretty apparent before. To me, anyway."

"Oh?" she said, looking curious. "Apparent to you, was it?" Well, who?"

"Freddie," I sighed. "Hang it, I like Freddie, too. But he must be the guy. His uncle, his 'accident' that broke the old springboard so the new one could cover Willie's body."

"Dope," said Len. "Why'd he put the new board in the wrong place, if he was the one who killed and buried Willie?"

"I don't know. To make it harder, maybe. Anyhow, he has the motive. We've all thought he was rich. I guess he is broke, and had to do in Willie to get the rest of the Grootenham fortune . . ."

The library door opened, then. The

butler, looking padded and rumped in a bathrobe, stuck his head in.

"Oh," he said. "It's you, Miss Seabright. And Mr. Grady. I heard a noise down here and came to investigate. Good night—"

"Wait a minute," said Len. "I was going to ring for you anyway. Wake up the rest and get them down here, will you?"

"Wake them up?" said the butler, eyebrows rising.

"That's right," said Len.

"All of them?"

"All of them," said Len.

"I'm afraid many of them might—refuse," said the butler, looking at the east window. Off on the skyline you could just see a dishwater-gray streak of dawn.

"Tell them," said Len, "that there's a dead man out under the lawn that needs a bit of explaining. That will bring them down."

The butler's lips gaped. He was doing my stunt, and I had a chance to see just how unlovely it was to flap your jaws like that. Then he left.

"Why do you have to get 'em all up?" I snapped. "Just to watch Freddie get tagged with murder?"

"Look," said Len, very patiently. "Why would Freddie kill Willie? It wouldn't do Freddie any good. That body was supposed to stay under the springboard slab permanently. Uncle Willie, from the fake telegrams, was supposed just to be missing. Gone off with a blonde under an assumed name, maybe, and had an accident and never heard of again. That means he wouldn't be judged legally dead for years. And till then Freddie wouldn't get a dime out of it."

"So?" I said.

"So Gloria Rapp killed Uncle Willie," said my small winsome part-

ner. "Not for anything that would come seven years from now when the missing Willie was legally pronounced dead, but for benefit accruing immediately."

"Lenore," I said slowly, "I've strung along with you till now. You've made wild guesses, and just happened to be right, since we went into this cockeyed business. But now, just because you don't like a person"—

"Gloria killed Willie," said Len, looking very, very sad. "Isn't it dreadful?"

The crowd started straggling in, then, so I shut up. But I was considering ways and means of getting Len out of the detecting business. I'd even marry her, if necessary.

FREDDIE was first down, looking like a pink and chubby elephant in his dressing gown. Kathleen Something and Lucia Something followed, in most alluring negligees. Then Toni and Algie and Dick trooped along, and after them, Gloria Rapp.

Gloria was the kind who sleeps neatly. Her hair was as slickly in place as ever, her skin wasn't smeared with cold cream, and her eyes were serenely awake. In fact, it abruptly occurred to me that perhaps she hadn't been sleeping at all. I looked at Len suddenly with just a shred of doubt in my doubt, if you get me.

"Len," said Freddie, "if *this* is a joke—at this time of night—"

"It's no joke," said Len. "I didn't give your butler that message just for the fun of it. There really is a dead man out under the lawn, and he really does need explaining."

They all stared at her, with skepticism in their faces at first, and then with growing consternation and fear. Len looked as dainty and nonessential

and unbusinesslike as ever, but something somewhere about her was impressive.

"You mean — really?" gulped Freddie.

"I mean really," said Len.

"Who is it?"

"Your Uncle Willie," said Len, and though the words might have had a humorous sound, her tone didn't. There was, underneath, a strong bond between Frederick Grootenham and Willem Grootenham, and Len knew it.

Freddie got white as powdered sugar and started for the door.

"You might as well sit down, Freddie," said Len. "You can't do anything out there, and it isn't a very nice thing to look at."

"The police—"

"I expect they'll be along pretty soon," said Len. "We—Link and I—caught a gangster out on the lawn, put there by the murderer to keep anybody from digging around. Link turned him over to the police. They'll be questioning him soon, and he'll be talking. He saw the corpse, and he won't want to be tied in with a killing."

Freddie sat down. He did it abruptly, mouth slack. The rest sat down too. I kept looking at Gloria Rapp. Her negligée was sheerest of all; and the sections of Gloria seen mistily through it would have kept any man looking. But in this case I was innocent of thought, so help me. I was looking at her face.

There was nothing on her face but sympathy for Freddie.

"Why?" moaned Freddie, looking vacantly at Len. "Why would any one kill Willie? He rounded around, and he wasn't what you'd call a heavy-weight, but he never did any one any real harm."

"He was killed because of what he knew," said Len.

"Willie didn't know much of anything," said Freddie, voice shaking. "He knew wines and polo and other pretty harmless and inconsequential things—"

"And showgirls," said Len.

Freddie looked at her.

"You and—Gloria—got yourselves engaged on this trip down to Palm Beach, didn't you?" said Len, with her sugary glance at Gloria making me more apprehensive than ever.

"Yes," said Freddie, staring. "Two weeks ago tomorrow night, it was."

"You let Willie know right away?"

"Yes. The same night. It was about two in the morning, but I knew Willie wouldn't be wasting time in sleep that early. So I—we—called him up in New York. I talked to him, and Gloria talked to him."

"Gloria talked to him last?" said Len.

The Rapp was looking at Len with dawning anger in her cool black eyes.

"Why, yes," said Freddie, his own tone getting a bit harsh. "I talked, and then she talked, and he congratulated both of us, and then he hung up."

"Were you in the room all the time Gloria talked? Did she ask you to go out and mix her a drink, or something?"

"Look here, Len," said Freddie, looking much less cherubic than usual. "I don't like the flavor of this."

"That's when it must have been arranged," said Len, staring thoughtfully at Gloria.

"What must have been arranged?" snapped Freddie.

"Willie's trip down here. Gloria must have arranged the secret meeting late at night in the summer house, then. She met him at the depot, I suppose, and drove him here, with no one else knowing he had even arrived—"

"It looks to me like somebody is going to get into a large mess of trouble," said Gloria, voice a sort of contralto of chill anger.

"—and then she killed him," Len's small, almost childlike voice finished off.

THERE was complete silence for about three seconds. Then Freddie jumped up and went toward Len in a way that drew me to my own feet with fists ready. After all, the little goof is my partner.

"Damn you, Len," spluttered Freddie thickly. "What are you talking about?"

"About Gloria Rapp," said Len. "She said she didn't know Willie. But a little while ago I called the producer of *The Silent Widow*, Gloria's last show, backed by Willie. The producer said Gloria knew Willie very well indeed, that it was probably her charming suggestions that made Willie play angel."

Freddie whirled from Len to Gloria. Then whirled back.

"All right," he rasped. "She knew Willie. What of it?"

"Use your wits, Freddie," Len said gently. "You're no child. You've been around. Gloria knew Willie. And *how* she knew him! An extremely pleasant if slightly irregular affair lasting for several months. Then it's over. So far, so good. But after that, two weeks ago, Willie is told that you, his nephew, are going to marry Gloria. After that warm friendship. What would Willie want to do?"

"Len, you—you—" choked Freddie.

Gloria was on her feet too, statuesque and cold in her blue negligée. Her eyes had the black-ice look. She stood so that her hands were behind her, bracing her shapely body against the edge of the big flat library table.

"Willie assured Gloria," Len went on, "that after what had happened between them, his nephew was certainly not going to make the trip to the altar with her. So she asked him to see her before seeing any one else, when he came down here. Willie did. He saw her in the summer house a couple of nights ago. After that he couldn't see any one else again, ever.

"Gloria," said Freddie, in a strangled tone, after a silence. "Well, Gloria, say something."

"Hardly necessary," Gloria drawled. "I'm too busy thinking. I'm going to get this cat for everything on the book, when the police come. False accusation, libel—everything."

"There you have your motive, Link," said Len, turning to me. "Kill Uncle Willie before he could break up a marriage with rich Freddie Grootenham. Eventually, when legal death had been proclaimed, get his fortune too, through Freddie. But when Gloria killed Willie, his toupee fell off and ruined everything."

The butler suddenly poked his head in the door.

"Mr. Grootenham, sir, there are men out by the pool. I believe they are police officers."

Freddie didn't say anything. He looked at Gloria, and he looked at Len.

"They'll be at the door in a minute," Len said. "I guess they're checking on the hole in the lawn where the old springboard used to be. Freddie, it was Gloria who told you of that queer diving board arrangement, wasn't it?"

Freddie's pallor had a touch of green in it.

"No," he said quickly.

"Thank you," Len nodded. "But Freddie, it won't do any good. The weapon she killed Willie with is at his side. It will have her prints on it."

Gloria laughed, then, and I felt sweat come out on my neck. Because I knew suddenly that the murder weapon was *not* buried with Willie. And I knew that Len didn't have one thing, really, on Gloria Rapp.

Len had a good story and was stuck with it.

Len, in a word, was licked.

"We've got proof against you, Gloria, from several different sources," Len said. But I could see in her eyes that she was getting a little uncertain about it. So could everyone else.

"Would you mind naming some of the sources?" said Gloria. Her tone was quiet, almost languid.

"Well, there are several," said Len uncertainly. And for the second time that night I felt sorry for her.

"Such as?" persisted Gloria, voice hard with triumph.

"Oh, lots," Len said weakly.

"Surely you don't object to mentioning them?"

"W-well, the man we captured on the lawn, for one," said Len lamely. "I'm sure he could recognize the voice that phoned him orders to keep any one from digging by the swimming pool."

I HAVE never seen anything more assured than Gloria's contemptuous smile. And I've never seen a match held more steadily than hers was after she struck it to light a cigarette taken from a case on the table behind her.

"My dear," said Gloria, "if you think that any one can identify a whisper, in a court of law—"

My sainted grandfather's pants!

You've seen a kaleidoscope? The little dinkus that you turn and look into, and colored objects fall into a pattern and hold it till you turn again? Well, we had a kaleidoscope in that library. Len had done the turning. The

people in the room fell into a frozen attitude. And they held it for what seemed ten minutes.

Freddie was staring at Gloria with stark terror in his eyes. Gloria was staring at nothing at all, while the match burned and burned, till it got to pink flesh. Her fingers opened and dropped it, but she kept on staring at nothing, eyes like great black opals.

"Gloria," croaked Freddie. "Gloria? Whisper? How would you know . . ."

"So you whispered your orders," nodded Len. "The man said that, too. But I wanted to hear you say so. It was awfully nice of you to—"

"Len! My God!" I yelled.

But the yell wasn't necessary. Len had seen Gloria's shapely—and muscular—right arm flash from behind her. She had seen the library shears clutched in the capable white hand. And Len had ducked as the shears whistled straight at her small, rust-red head.

They went over her and banged against the closed door, handles first. They dropped with a clang, in the stunned silence.

And as if echoing it, there was a tap on the door-panel. And the butler's voice.

"The police officers, sir. They are at the door."

"Bring them in," said Freddie. He looked middle-aged. He walked to the library table, skirting carefully around the quivering, staring heap that was Gloria Rapp, and opened the drawer and took out a checkbook.

"You said it would be a bargain, Len, when I offered you ten thousand. And it is. I'd have married that—her."

They left us alone in the library, after what seemed hours. And I took Len by her slim shoulders and held her so that her eyes couldn't keep giving mine a kiss.

"You smelled out a murder from a toupee," I said. "That's fine. That's dandy. But you know yourself that the mere finding of that dime-sized wig didn't warrant you or any one else in announcing calmly that the owner of it had recently been killed."

"But it did, Link!" Len said, eyes wide and naive. "Look. Would any one but an incredibly vain man bother to have a toupee made at all to cover so small a bald spot?"

"Maybe not. But—"

"All right. Would a man as vain as all that drop a wig—and not instantly know it and retrieve it?"

"Well, possibly not. But—"

"If the toupee had been larger, I wouldn't have been so sure," said Len. "As it was, I knew that only one thing would get that wig off that head and keep it off. Death. You see?"

"So you fabricated a murder case on a thing like that," I snarled. "And with the devil's own luck, you got away with it. And I suppose you'll actually try something like that again. Me, I'm through. Washed up. You hear?"

She turned demure on me, damn her. "Through, Link?" she faltered.

"Through with being your partner. I suppose I'll see you personally, once in awhile. But as for being in business with you? Not any more! You'll crash head on with your wild guesses some day, and I don't want to be around and get buried under the pieces."

"I'll m-miss you, Link."

She looked as if she were about to cry. Eyes bright with unshed tears, lips quivering a little. And I, who had seen her in action a hundred times and *knew* how smooth she was, found myself patting one of her shoulders instead of gripping it.

"Oh, well, I'll stick around long enough for us to wind up the business." I said.

She kissed the tip of my nose.

"Splendid, Link! Say—let's go to Havana. I've always wanted to see them make cigars. And they probably murder people and steal things in Havana just like in Florida. Isn't it dreadful, Link, the amount of crime and stuff that's always going on?"

COMING SOON

SATAN COMES ACROSS

by BENNETT BARLAY

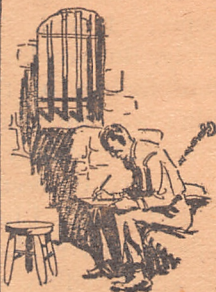
"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, drive a lovely car, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the in-

visible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You, too, may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you, too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use, too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 151, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.



Twice I reached for the dollar, drew my hand back

One Dollar—One Corpse

By Bennett Barlay

The price of a good, square meal and the peace of death was only one dollar—not too high for George Lawson

Ossining, N. Y.
January 10, 1940
11:15 P. M.

DEAR MOM:

It's funny how clearly you can see things when you're hungry. I never realized because I was never hungry when I was home on the farm with you and Dad. But I had to come to New York; I felt too stifled there, seeing the same faces day after day. So I left.

Somehow, when I was in New York

and couldn't get a job, I lacked the courage to write you for money. Oh, I know Dad would have sent me a money-order and never have thrown it up to me, but I felt I had to make good on my own. So I kept on looking for a job, not writing home, even when the time came that I had to sleep in the park.

Before that happened, I pawned everything I owned. First to go was my watch, the one you gave me for Christmas. I had already moved to a cheaper room on West

Fourteenth Street. When that money was gone, I pawned the pen and pencil set that Dad gave me. After that, in quick succession, went all my possessions: my books, the cuff links that Mary gave me, my ring, three suits, four pairs of shoes, my overcoat, my topcoat, the suitcases. Then suddenly, there wasn't anything else to pawn. I thought of exchanging my last suit—the new one I bought just before leaving—for an older one, but I hung on to it hoping that it would help me land a job.

DEFENDANT: *George T. Lawson*

ADDRESS: *Penley Hotel*

AGE: 23 SEX: Male COLOR: White

HEIGHT: 5' 10" WEIGHT: 157

HAIR: Brown EYES: Brown

IDENTIFICATION MARKS:

Fresh scar on right wrist

OCCUPATION: None

CHARGE: *Forgery*

ARRESTED: *April 15, 1939*

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

"We have, Your Honor."

"What is your verdict?"

"We find the defendant, George T. Lawson, not guilty as charged, due to lack of evidence."

After I missed the first three meals, I thought of suicide. I even went so far as to try it. I took my last razor blade and went into the dingy hall bathroom. I filled the tub with warm water, sat in it, and cut my right wrist. Like everything else, it was a bungled job. It only bled a little. But that was as far as I got. It hurt too much.

You know, I think maybe that has always been my trouble—it hurt too much. It hurt my pride too much to write home for money; it hurt my wrist too much to commit suicide; it hurt my stomach too much to go hungry. You might put that on my tombstone: Here Lies Our Son Who Died Because It Hurt Too Much To Live.

Anyway, that day I looked at my bleeding wrist and then was sick in the bowl. Then I took a hot bath, the one thing I could still do. But that was the last day

for even that. The same evening the landlady put a padlock on my door. That night I slept in the park.

STATE OF NEW YORK vs GEORGE T. LAWSON
MAY 18, 1939 A.D.

"... George T. Lawson did wilfully and knowingly pass counterfeit money at the following stores. . . ."

"How do you plead, George Lawson?"

"Not guilty!"

"Now, Mr. Spellman, can you identify the defendant as the man who gave you a counterfeit bill on the morning of April 27th?"

"I'm not sure."

"Mr. Spellman, didn't you, on the morning of April 28th, while in the office of the District Attorney, identify the defendant as the man who gave you the counterfeit bill?"

"I don't remember."

"Mr. Spellman, have you been approached, by persons representing the defendant, with intimidation or bribery?"

"I object!"

"Objection sustained. . . ."

"I don't remember. . . ."

"I'm not certain. . . ."

"Maybe I was wrong. . . ."

"We find the defendant, George T. Lawson, not guilty as charged."

Three nights I slept in the park. Two mornings I was able to get some old rolls from a bakery. Once, an old man gave me a dime to buy some coffee. I had a fresh sweet roll with the coffee. Once, I got a meal at a little restaurant on the Bowery. The soup was weak, the meat was greasy, but it tasted wonderful.

All the time I kept thinking of the meals at home! of steaming platters of ham, big slices of bacon with fresh eggs, of the cream pies you used to bake because you knew I loved them. I would sit in the park at night and say to myself, "My mother is the best cook in the world!" Over and over again.

Once, I thought of robbing someone who came through the park late at night.

I had a victim picked one night, but as he drew closer, my stomach tightened into a knot of pain. My hands were nerveless and wet. When he had passed, I leaned back on the bench as weak as that time I had pneumonia.

On the morning of the fourth day, I left my park bench as usual and washed in the fountain nearby. My stomach hurt, I was shaky, the skin over my cheekbones seemed to be stretched taut. I was hungry.

I started to walk downtown. Everything seemed so clear, nothing escaped my notice. People hurrying to work, to school, to love. Here, prosperity—there, poverty. An old woman, cursing under her breath, dug into a garbage can. Her face brightened as one skinny hand came up clutching a mouldy piece of bread. A young girl, still dressed in a vivid evening gown, laughed drunkenly from a passing cab. A young man picked a cigarette butt from the street. A middle-aged man cursed his chauffeur for being two minutes late. A couple of kids strolled schoolward, arm in arm. The boy pinched the girl lightly. The girl laughed uncertainly. I could feel the buds straining against their prisons in the trees. The hot smell of coffee came to me from a restaurant, making me dizzy.

I had long before given up trying to get a decent job. The stomach dictates to pride. I wanted any kind of a job, at any salary. This morning I decided to go again to see Mr. Hollack at the Hollack Sporting Goods Store. I had been there three times before, but Mr. Hollack had always encouraged me to come back. You know, nothing now but maybe later. . . . If there wasn't anything this morning, I had decided I must either wire you and Dad, or else try the East River.

STATE OF NEW YORK *vs* GEORGE LERNER
JULY 10, 1939 A.D.

" . . . attempted robbery upon the person of Henry McLait. . . ."

" . . . we ask that Your Honor temper justice with mercy. We ask that you consider the plight of the defendant, George

Lerner . . . offers to plead guilty . . . this young man, homeless, without a mother or a father to guide his footsteps in the right direction, unemployed, having no one to whom he could turn in time of stress, facing starvation . . . for a moment blind to the right and wrong as prescribed by the socialized world—a world which had failed to give him the right to earn his existence. . . . We understand that Mr. McLait himself has offered to be responsible for the defendant if paroled in his care . . . give this young man the chance, which he deserves, of being reclaimed for society. . . ."

" . . . sentenced to one to five years in the state prison at Ossining . . . said sentence to be suspended . . . defendant is to be paroled in the care of Henry McLait. . . ."

I finally reached the store and stood outside for a minute, looking in the windows. They were filled with shiny shotguns and rifles, with fishing tackle, black hip boots like Dad used to wear when he went trout-casting. I entered the store.

There was a customer there, a fat, florid man who was looking at a double-barreled shotgun. He was exasperated and his voice rose and fell harshly. I think he was recounting the loss of another gun. Mr. Hollack looked at me blankly, rearranged some fishing tackle on the counter and walked with the customer to the other end of the store where there was a showcase with more guns. I leaned against the counter and waited. I was weak from hunger.

Then I saw it. An old, crumpled dollar bill lying on the counter. I tried to look away but my eyes kept coming back to it fascinated. I told you my powers of observation were acute that morning. I seemed to see everything about that dollar bill. The creases criss-crossed over the face of Washington, making him look as though he had a broken nose. There was a smudge of chocolate on the bill, looking as if it had dribbled from Washington's chin. I was conscious of the signatures of

the Treasurer and the Secretary of the Treasury. There was the serial number, WT4920699672AZC. Up in the lefthand corner, over the figure 1, it said, "This certificate is legal tender for all debts, public and private, *and will pay for a large, juicy steak with French fries.*" I know that last part wasn't there but my mind added it.

My heart hammered rapidly. It was saying over and over, *take it! take it!*" Twice I reached for it, drew my hand back. It seemed to moved nearer to me. There was a buzzing noise in my ears, I was nauseated.

Mr. Hollack was in serious conversation with the fat man. I grabbed the dollar.

STATE OF NEW YORK vs GEORGE T. LORMER
AUGUST 8, 1939 A.D.

"... charged with breaking and entering ..."

"... the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I do."

"What is your name?"

"Babe Harper."

"Where do you live, Miss Harper?"

"Hotel Belton."

"Do you know the defendant, George T. Lormer?"

"I oughta. I live with him."

"Do you know anything of the whereabouts of the defendant on the night of July 28th?"

"Yeah, he was with me."

"All night?"

"Yeah."

"Could he have been away for any length of time without your knowing it?"

"I should say not!"

"Your witness, Mr. Dalt."

"Isn't it true, Miss Harper, that you were arrested March 2nd, 1937, charged with soliciting on the streets?"

"I object! Miss Harpers' morals of two years ago has nothing to do with my client's case."

"Objection sustained."

"... case dismissed. ..."

It seemed like hours that I stood there just holding that dollar in my wet palm. I wanted to run. I wanted to put the dollar somewhere they wouldn't find it if I were stopped and searched. I thought of putting it into my mouth, but I realized that I wouldn't be able to talk. Then I thought of the little secret pocket on the inside of my vest. Remember, we joked about that when I bought the suit? Mary was along, and I said when I came back to marry her, I would have all my suits made with that pocket so I would have a place to hide letters from "the other woman." We all laughed.

I tucked the dollar in the pocket and buttoned my vest again. I started to walk out. Then Mr. Hollack looked up and called my name sharply. I turned back, fear clutching at my heart, fear adding to the hunger pains in my stomach. Involuntarily I clutched at the pocket in my vest—clutched to hold on to that dollar.

"I saw you!" screamed Mr. Hollack. "I saw you steal that dollar! You low-lifer! You bum! You saw him, too, didn't you Mr. Best?"

The customer nodded his head and growled something about making an example of young thieves like me. He left.

"You come into the back room," Mr. Hollack ordered. "Hah! We'll see what should be done about a low-lifer what would steal from an old man like me."

We went into the back room.

STATE OF NEW YORK vs GEORGE T. LAWSON
AUGUST 29, 1939 A.D.

"George T. Lawson, you are charged with stealing one hundred thousand dollars in negotiable bonds from Henry McLait. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty."

DEFENDANT: George T. Lawson

TRIAL SET FOR: Sept. 5, 1939

BOND: \$5,000

BOND POSTED BY: Henry McLait

Mr. Hollack sat there in that back room and painted a picture of what prison would mean to me. The fact that only a

dollar was involved apparently made no difference. I was a thief, and there was only one end for a thief. I sat and listened, but I had no feeling. I was conscious of only two things: the pounding of my heart and the growing hunger.

Then he changed his tune and talked of the pleasure of sitting down to a good meal, of sleeping in a good bed, of having a few dollars to spend. He drew a realistic picture of the good food that could be bought in New York if you knew where to go. I could have killed him.

THE EVENING PRESS

New York, N. Y. August 30, 1939

MERCHANT MURDERED

Benjamin Hollack, owner of a sporting goods store on lower Broadway, was murdered late this afternoon by one of the guns from his own showcase. Police arrested George T. Lawson, who was found standing over the body of the merchant, the murder gun still gripped in his hand. Lawson was indicted yesterday for the theft of bonds, totaling \$100,000, from Henry McLait, a business acquaintance of Hollack's.

One thing which has puzzled the police is the discovery of the McLait bonds in the office safe of Hollack. Captain Henderson is of the theory, however, that Lawson went there to plant the bonds and make Hollack's murder appear like suicide. The quick action of the police, when a passerby heard the shot and hailed a nearby patrol car, kept the murderer from completing the frame.

After torturing me like that for several minutes, Hollack came out in the open. He was a crook, the head of a large gang. The gang included forgers, counterfeiters, hold-up men and burglars. He said they could use a man like me. It was either that, or go to jail for stealing the dollar. He said it wouldn't make any difference if I did know about him. Nobody would take the word of a bum, thief, against that of a respectable merchant.

I agreed to work for him. Please, Mom, don't think that my turning was as simple as that. But when you're as hungry as I was, the difference between right and wrong isn't as great as it is when you have security. It changes everything.

STATE OF NEW YORK vs GEORGE T. LAWSON
SEPTEMBER 15, 1939 A.D.

"... George T. Lawson, alias George Lerner, alias George T. Lormer ... charged with murder in the first degree. . . ."

"We find the defendant, George T. Lawson, guilty as charged. . . ."

"... sentence you to die in the electric chair at Sing Sing not later than midnight, January 10, 1940. . . ."

He took me out and bought me a dinner. Then I had a shave and hair cut. The next day I went to work for him. He had me doing everything from cashing the forged checks to stealing the bonds from Mr. McLait, who had befriended me. But food is about all I got out of it. That and lawyers when I was arrested. But Babe Harper was my own alibi. When I was arrested for stealing the bonds, Hollack sent word that he wouldn't help me any more; that I wasn't of any value to him after that. No value to him! In all that time he hadn't given me any money. The most money I'd had in my pocket at any time was five dollars he'd handed me once when he was feeling generous. And when I was arrested for grand larceny, I had just thirty cents in my pocket!

"... prisoner 67435. Take off your clothes. Put these on. . . . Nothing left in your clothes? Everything checked with the Warden? . . . Here's something in an inside vest pocket. . . . A dollar bill, you didn't know about, eh? Well, we'll credit this to you. Maybe you'll want some cigarettes, or something. . . ."

Serial Number WT4920699672AZC
This certificate is legal tender for all debts,
public and private.

So when the guard found the dollar I had forgotten, I had a total of \$1.30. But I didn't spend the dollar. I asked the warden to send it to you when I'm gone. If you frame it and keep it where Joe can see it maybe when he grows up, he will

learn the lesson of life that I didn't.

Tonight I had a good dinner. Country-cured ham like you used to fix, mashed potatoes with gravy, green peas, new corn. As I ate it, I could almost see you and Dad sitting beside me. Then I had strawberries for dessert—I guess to remind me of the times Mary and I used to go back on the hill and pick them. And I would kiss her every time that I found a double berry.

They are coming for me now. Tell Mary that I will always love her. I'm

sorry it had to happen this way. I have hurt the three people I love most because I couldn't stand hurting myself.

Maybe it's better. Maybe Mary will find someone who can make her happier. Maybe you and Dad can use me as an example to make Joe into a son you can be proud of. Goodby.

Love, your son,

GEORGE.

The prison doctor pronounced George T. Lawson dead at 11:59:30 tonight. . . .

SATAN COMES ACROSS

Who was the mysterious, masked man, calling himself Satan II, who threatened the peace of America? Who was back of the super-spy ring being formed?

by BENNETT BARLAY

(In Detective Fiction Weekly for March 9th)

● SPOT THIS "SPOT" ON YOUR CALENDAR!

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THE BLIND SPOT

by

Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint

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ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOKIE ALLEN

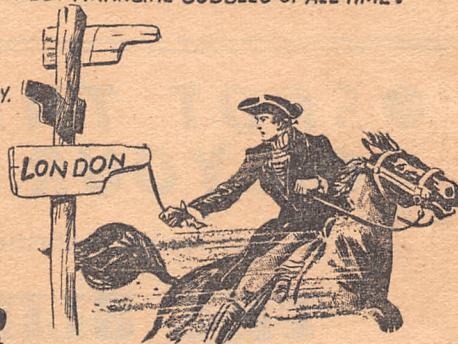


The Scotchman Who Bankrupted FRANCE

JOHN LAW WAS BORN IN GLASGOW, SCOTLAND, IN 1671. A MATHEMATICAL WIZARD BY INHERITANCE (HIS FATHER WAS A BANKER), AND A GAMBLER BY INCLINATION, HE WAS IDEALLY EQUIPPED FOR THE PART HE WAS TO PLAY IN PROMOTING ONE OF THE GREATEST FINANCIAL BUBBLES OF ALL TIME.

DISSIPATING HIS INHERITANCE, LAW KILLED ONE "BEAU" AUSTIN IN A DUEL AND WAS SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR MURDER. THE SENTENCE COMMUTED, HE FLED TO AMSTERDAM TO ESCAPE THE VENGEANCE OF HIS VICTIM'S FAMILY.

THERE HE ENGAGED IN BANKING, GAMBLING ON THE SIDE, AND IN 1709 RETURNED TO SCOTLAND TO ORGANIZE A STATE BANK, A SCHEME BASED ON THE ISSUANCE OF PAPER MONEY, WHICH SOON COLLAPSED. WHEREUPON LAW WAS RUN OUT OF SEVERAL CONTINENTAL CITIES IN THE COURSE OF WINNING \$500,000 BY DOWNRIGHT GAMBLING.



HIS STATE BANK IDEA HAVING COME TO THE ATTENTION OF THE RIGHT PEOPLE, IN 1710 LAW WAS ASKED TO FORM A BANK FOR FRANCE. THE BANQUE ROYALE WAS AN INSTANT SUCCESS. TRADE AND INDUSTRY BOOMED. LAW WAS MADE CONTROLLER-GENERAL IN CHARGE OF ALL FRANCE'S FINANCES. HE ASSUMED THE NATIONAL DEBT AND COLLECTED TAXES.

Coming Next Week—



John Law

FROM AN OLD PRINT

THE BANQUE PAID LARGE DIVIDENDS AND PEOPLE FLOCKED TO PARIS TO SPECULATE MADLY IN ITS SHARES. REAL ESTATE VALUES SKYROCKETED. THEN THE BUBBLE BURST. THE BANQUE SUSPENDED PAYMENT, LAW'S VAST ESTATES WERE CONFISCATED. NEVERTHELESS, IN 1720 CZAR PETER INVITED HIM TO TAKE CHARGE OF RUSSIA'S FINANCES. BUT LAW WAS TOO BUSY KEEPING OUT OF THE CLUTCHES OF HIS OWN CREDITORS.



YET HE COULD ALWAYS FIND TIME TO GAMBLE, IN FACT MADE A VERY GOOD THING OF IT. IT IS SAID HIS FINAL BET WAS TO WAGER HIS LAST \$5,000 TO A QUARTER AGAINST AN OPPONENT THROWING SIX DOUBLE SIXES IN A ROW. HE WON.

LAW DIED IN 1729 AT VENICE, HIS BUSINESS ABILITY STILL HELD IN HIGH ESTEEM. POSTERITY HAS DESIGNATED HIM AS ONE OF THE GREATEST IMPOSTERS OF HISTORY.

A Hog Squealed Murder

The Blue Ghost



The Blue Ghost snapped an answering shot at Magda

By Myles Hudson

The House of a Thousand Horrors, where even the walls laughed with satanic glee at the antics of the mad magician

CHARLES DEXTER BRADFORD, his life dedicated to fighting crime under the name of The Blue Ghost, goes to Florida to recover from a wound. With him goes Adam Wilde, New York publisher, who is the only person aware that Bradford and The Blue Ghost are the same. While there, they run into some sort of a criminal plot directed against John Warlock, retired magician. Appearances point to the possibility of Warlock being insane.

When the magician and his household return north to Warlock's home, the House of a Thousand Horrors, The Blue Ghost follows. He learns that, in some way, a group of international spies known as The Third Party are after Warlock.

Late at night The Blue Ghost slips into the House of a Thousand Horrors. As he enters an upper room, a strange whisper comes to him out of the darkness: "I'm beaten. Go on and get it done, whoever you are, and end this agony."

It is John Warlock!

CHAPTER XVI

The Shadows of the Dark

HE SAT in a big leather chair, the shaggy-bearded magician, and his eyes stared steadily into the faint beam of The Blue

Ghost's light. In those eyes was no glare of madness, and no twist of violence marred his face. Instead Dex saw a man who was weary and baffled, an exhausted giant who had reached the end of his rope.

He knew the cunning an insane mind may possess, the clever posings that are a maniac's mask, yet all his trained instincts were agreed that this was no mockery here. What, then, was the mystery of Warlock?

"I haven't come to harm you," Dex said. His reaction was instant. "I've come tonight to help you, Mr. Warlock."

His green flash played across the huge figure in the Oriental robe. He was sitting stiffly there, his head thrown back and his arms forced peculiarly behind him. The flickering beam showed the glitter of handcuffs that locked his wrists at the rear of the chair and held him prisoner.

"Who chained you there?" Dex asked.

"I did."

"You? But why?"

"It's coming tonight," Warlock said. "For two nights nothing's happened, which means the third will be bad. I've chained myself here—" he breathed—"to keep from killing my grandson."

Dex switched off the beam and in the silent dark his mind was racing. Half-formed theories were crumpling, new aspects revolved in his brain. He knew he was hearing the truth here, and that all the jigsaw pieces of the Warlock puzzle would have to be reshuffled now.

"Who are you?" Warlock asked.

"Look—" Dex said. He turned the green ray upon his own face and held it steady.

Warlock's head jerked forward and

the leather of the chair squeaked beneath his shifted weight. "Dan—" he muttered. "Your voice—" And then he drew in a long breath. "Yes," he said softly, "I see the pigments now. Who are you? Why are you here?"

The finger of light switched down to a cupped hand. It glowed against a sheen of white, a small oblong card on which an ink-blot gleamed.

"Does that mean anything?" Dex asked.

"Wait!" Warlock said. "That sign—yes. You are—"

"I am called The Blue Ghost," Dex's whisper returned, "and I'm here at your service. Can we talk safely, Mr. Warlock? Will you tell me what is wrong in this house, and what nightmare is riding your back?"

The great magician's rigid body relaxed. "The walls have been sound-proofed," he said. "Sometimes I—I am not quiet at times. The nurse in the hall—my medicine's not due until eleven-thirty."

"Will you trust me with your story?"

"I trust your voice," said Warlock. "I trust your name. And what have I left to lose?" He jerked his head. "Jill smuggled me these handcuffs. The key's on the table there. Will you unlock them, please?"

The memory of those great hairy hands at The Blue Ghost's throat was not forgotten, yet Dex did not hesitate. He released the steel cuffs.

Warlock flexed his heavy shoulders, stretched his long arms. His finger spun the ivory prayer-wheel which he had been gripping behind him. "Where shall I begin?" he asked.

"At the beginning. Start with the time when things began to go wrong."

"Yes," Warlock said. "It was at the end of this last trip. I had had the

fever—just a touch—and then everything happened. It began that day at Mukden where we boarded the plane to fly us outside. We passed through the final customs inspections. . . .”

Soft words murmured in the dark—

And in another room not far away, beyond the elbow of the hall, Jill Conroy sat in her bed with arms wrapped around her knees.

“You shouldn’t have come,” she said. “Those prowling freaks of his— isn’t tomorrow soon enough?”

“No,” Dan Gibson answered. “I— why did you walk with Strang tonight?”

“You’re vinegar,” she said, “and I’m honey. See who catches the most flies.”

“Did you want to make me jealous?” he asked. “Whose team are you playing on, anyhow?”

“My own team,” she said. “From now on I’m taking care of Little Jill. I can smell the trouble that’s ready to break around here.”

She tried to push him away but his arms were too strong. After an interval she lay quiet in his embrace and did not resist the fury of his kisses.

“How can I tell you how I love you?” he breathed. “How can I prove what I feel?”

Her hand stopped his mouth. “You’re a funny boy, Dan. I’m not sure of you sometimes. Do you really love me—or is it all just some more of your bluff?”

“Try me,” he begged. “Do you think I’d endure all this mess here if it wasn’t for you? What do you want of me, Jill? Ask it, that’s all, just ask it.”

“I want you to climb back out that window and go back to your room. Don’t be a fool, Dan.”

Unwillingly his arms relaxed. He rose.

•
“We were spied upon day and night,” Warlock said. “There were ghost eyes trailing us. In the International Settlement I was mysteriously waylaid twice. They even stripped me naked the second time. Our luggage was ransacked. My Mongol headman—a fellow I had arranged to bring across—he simply disappeared. And aboard the ship from Singapore, it was a repetition of that. It was impossible to sleep normally. Every move I made was shadowed. Dittmars maintains that once our food was poisoned or drugged.”

“Who else was along?” Dex asked.

“Eh? Oh, I made the journey into Tibet alone. Dittmars was my outside contact, joining me from Shanghai. When we landed in America I hoped that was the end of it. I was sick, nervous, done in. But it was only the beginning of the second stage?”

“Have you ever heard of the Star List, Mr. Warlock?”

“What’s that? Star—no, what do you mean?”

“Never mind. How long have you been addicted to narcotics?”

Warlock sucked in a long breath. His big hands clasped together and he rocked in his chair. “Not long,” he whispered. “I’m not really—I’ve broken it off. How did you know?”

“I understand,” Dex said, “that initiates into the higher realms of the occult are sometimes encouraged to try hashish or opium. It brings the soul, they claim, into a more essential state of harmony. . . .”

Warlock bowed his head.

“It also makes them more susceptible to fakery,” Dex went on, “but that’s not important. You’ve gone

into these researches of yours very enthusiastically, haven't you, Mr. Warlock? You were anxious to learn, eager to be impressed. All the mumbo-jumbo of it is strong in your mind even now—isn't that correct?"

"Perhaps," Warlock said.

"And how do you account yourself for all these things that have happened?"

"It was the tomb I robbed," said the magician. "I dipped my hand in death. It is the Curse of Ka'ang."

And the sea waves too were whispering. . . .

They lapped the planking of the yacht *El Perdido* as she lay at anchor beyond the shore mists with her swift trip ended. Lightless and forlorn she rode the swells, but aboard her there was bustling activity.

"I can risk it no closer in," the swarthy captain said. "There are bad reefs, islands—this shore is dangerous."

"But it is Cragmoor, eh?" asked the woman, Magda. "Your new pilot has made no mistake?"

"No mistake." He gestured. "On a clear night from here you could see the lights of the house on the cliff."

"Well done, Captain," said white-haired Gregor Ivanov. He turned up the collar of his long coat. "Make the auxiliary ready. I will need six men, well armed."

The woman glanced at him. "You are in a hurry, no? Might it not be better to spy out the situation there—"

His gesture cut her short. "Each hour is precious, each minute. If we fail—what difference if we are dead men tomorrow or tonight?"

He lifted a heavy revolver from the cabin table and began to fit it with a cylindrical contrivance, a silencer. "If

we do not return before dawn," he said, "I will see you in hell, Comrade Magda."

•

The Blue Ghost said, "Yes, I understand. There was some such superstition connected with the tomb of Tut-ankh-amen* in Egypt. The variation in your case, though, is you yourself are not threatened with death by the Curse of Ka'ang. Instead it has made you a sort of Typhoid Mary to destroy those who are close to you, whom you love best. Is that what you believe?"

"Laugh at me," Warlock said. "Go ahead and call me a fool. But I tell you the voices have followed me. I have heard them, seen the shadow figures in the room. Laugh off the blood on my hands, and the coins they leave behind, and the murderous attacks I've made when my mind has been full of the crazy dreams they put there."

"We believe what we believe," Dex said. "What does your Dr. Strang think? What is he treating you for?"

"Strang? He calls them hallucinations. He says I'm undermined by fever, by my adventure in drugs. He is treating me for narcotic poisoning, a breakdown—but what does Strang know? I have seen the yellow-hat lamas make men out of fog. I've seen the dead returned to life—"

"You are also an excellent subject for hypnotism, I imagine," Dex said. "Do you recall one night in Florida? Do you remember Johnny's room and the man you fought there? Were you possessed of your senses then?"

"I—yes—I don't know. They say I attacked a maid, but I don't remember. The voices were whispering, say

* The untimely deaths of Lord Carnarvon and several others who were engaged in the excavation of King Tut's tomb is a matter of record. These circumstances, however, are not worthy of the weight that occultists would place upon them. They prove nothing. M. H.

ing the boy was in danger, urging me to go to his aid. I—it was all a nightmare."

"Then you didn't go to the room to kill him?"

"No—God, no! But they say I've tried to, other times. When the voices start to whisper I can escape from my room. I go prowling, with my mind a blank. I attack the guards and the maids—anybody. There was a man in my room one night that I—I strangled."

There are wires across the distance, and tonight they sang. In the old Treadway cottage, at the edge of Cragmoor Village, Prentiss Savage spoke into the telephone. His voice was lightly cheerful but his hand was nervous and sweat was on his brow.

"The weather's very warm," he said. "Yes, it's unusually warm here. Quite a bit of excitement, too. I find it rather lonely, all by myself."

"Dunbar — yes, he's arrived in force," he said after a pause. "I'm a bit worried, though, about the lack of news concerning our old friend, Warlock. Condition of patient unchanged, was my last report. I thought perhaps you might want—"

"You will?" he breathed. "You'll come yourself? As soon as you can—yes, yes, that's excellent."

He wiped his brow as he placed the receiver down. Twice he paced nervously across the room, then he went to a curtained window and threw it open. He breathed in the fresh coolness of the night, his chest rising and falling.

When he had closed the window again, a shadowed form moved away from the base of it. It was a big man who had been listening there, but he moved away softly for all his bulk. He

returned to the main road, proceeded towards the village. At the lights of the Shipshape Tavern he entered.

"Brisk night what?" he said to the proprietor. "Changed my mind when I was halfway home and decided to have another nightcap, dontcha know. The same please—yes, whiskey-soda."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n," the tavern-keeper said. "Drink hearty."

In John Warlock's dark room Dex Bradford's keen logic fought a battle against fantasy. The great magician could attribute the mystery that held him in its toils to the inhuman powers of some fabulous never-never realm, but The Blue Ghost dealt in realities and fact. Warlock had lived in a world of illusion so long that now his sick mind grasped at the straws of his own deceit. But The Blue Ghost knew that the Curse of Ka'ang was a mortal agency, deviously working.

Yet what devilment was behind it? Who was pulling the strings—and why?

"I have asked you about the members of your household" he said "because we must plan our next move now. When a man has as many millions as you've accumulated, Mr. Warlock, he can never be sure which man he can trust. You admit that Strang and Jolliffe might profit by the terms of your new will, still you do not doubt them. Dittmars must be blameless, you say, because he's been your shadow for a quarter century. What about your ward and young Gibson? Why your new animosity for them?"

"They are headstrong young fools," Warlock muttered. "They will not listen to common sense. The new will does not change their inheritances at all—except in the event they marry."

"And why shouldn't they?"

Warlock gripped the arms of his chair. "They are not mated. Their auras have no harmony."

"All right," Dex shrugged, "we can trust your curious servants, at least. You're not safe here, Johnny's not safe—they must help to get you both away tonight. They mentioned some island—what about that?"

"The island—yes, there's a cabin there. It's lonely unused for years. But I couldn't—don't you see I couldn't trust myself. . . ."

"Hush!" Dex whispered. "What's that outside?"

Warlock lurched erect. "Strang!" he breathed. "My sleeping dose. You've got to—where can you hide?"

Hush-hush and hide!

And that was the rule of the night, too, at the Haskell place where Captain Harper-Lytton's Oriental butler opened the rear door to five furtive men. They had arrived up the coast by private seaplane and a swift car had rushed them here. They were white men all, close-mouthed and competent.

"Utmost importance," the tallest of them said. "Can we talk?"

"I carried him upstairs in a drunken stupor," Ito said. "We are alone."

"The Russian prisoner has broken," said the tall man. "He has gone insane, the Shanghai cable reports, but the clue was in his crazy babbling. The papers were hidden among Warlock's effects, as believed. Our mistake was in seeking an item of size. The originals were reproduced and destroyed. He hid the duplicates—"

"What was it?" Ito rasped.

The man glanced above. "A creaking. I thought I heard—"

Ito was gone three minutes. "Snoring his whiskey away," he reported.

"All these old houses are full of sounds. Where were they hidden then?"

The white man produced a typed flimsy. "Here is the list of Warlock's personal effects." His finger ran down it and stopped with a jerk.

Ito's dark eyes narrowed. His lips formed a razor-edged smile. "You came prepared?" he asked.

"Riot guns in the car," said the other. "How many against us?"

"Not enough," said Ito softly. "In an hour we can be safe away—"

His head jerked birdlike and a hand darted to the pocket of his robe. For again the ceiling above had seemed to echo a sound like a rat's soft scuffle combined with a rat's soft squeak.

The six in the kitchen stared at each other questioningly.

CHAPTER XVII

The Curse of Ka'ang

A HULKING male nurse stood watchfully at the foot of the bed while Dr. Felix Strang examined his patient. The physician's thin fingers metered Warlock's pulse, distended his eyelids, then the hands rubbed thoughtfully together.

"You're excited, John" he said. "Has there been—has anything happened?"

"No," Warlock muttered. "Not yet."

"And nothing will" said Strang with conviction. "I have learned—" he frowned at the nurse—"that the night-watch outside your door has been none too alert. There will be no more wandering away from stations henceforth. Moreover, Jolliffe and myself—"

He shrugged. "You'll find the bad dreams have been banished John." He

leaned down to peer at Warlock closely, and his voice softened. "You're safe here, John—safe. This is your home—you are safe."

Warlock moved restlessly against his pillow.

The doctor glanced at the ivory prayer-wheel the magician gripped and shrugged again. "Two glasses" he said to the nurse. "The green bottle and the Number Two solution."

The man went outside.

Strang rubbed his chin as he surveyed the bare room. They had removed from it every small object with which the patient might do himself injury. He stared at the curtained windows the small circle of a wall safe, the doorway of the bath adjoining.

"Rain in the air," he remarked. "We'll have a storm before morning."

When the nurse returned he crushed two white pellets in one glass and slowly added the pale yellowish liquid from another. "Here's sleep for you, John—the solid rest you need."

Warlock hesitated, then drank reluctantly.

Dr. Strang drew the heavy chair closer to the bed and sat comfortably. He spoke aimlessly in a soft monotonous voice, discussing the casual topics of the day. Warlock replied to his questions shortly, and in a few moments his head lolled back against the pillow.

"Sleepy—" he muttered. "Sleep . . ."

Strang extinguished the lights and returned to his chair. He sat silent and motionless in the dark while long minutes ticked. Then his shadow moved as he felt Warlock's pulse again. He twisted the knob of the door in signal. In the path of light from the hall he could be seen to nod and whisper some remark to the nurse. The door closed behind him, and in the

dim room was no sound except the steady sibilance of Warlock's breathing.

There was a brief passage of time before the faintest jingle came from the bath. The shower curtains softly rustled, and The Blue Ghost peered into the room where the magician lay in heavy slumber. He did not enter.

He could not logically account for the instinct which held him warily there. He had expected the usual light sleeping draught from which Warlock could easily rouse himself, but Strang had lingered in the room too long. What drug had produced such instant lethargy? How could Warlock be waked from the depth of it?

He considered Strang's peculiar professional actions, his odd usage of voice and gesture and eye, but it was not the thought of post-hypnotic suggestion that froze him in delaying silence. Rather it was the acute feeling of some menace that surrounded the room, that was soon to strike.

Ten! twelve! fifteen vacuum minutes . . .

And then it came!

First the scent, the dead, unholy smell.

It seeped in, a foul miasma that spread and strengthened until contaminated the room. There was ancient decay, the dry must of centuries in it and pervading all was the bitterness of heathen incense with a bestial pungence merged. It breathed at his eyes wafted a sour harshness in his throat.

John Warlock coughed. He flung out his arm and groaned.

And the sounds came after, the ugly little hollow sounds that were ten terrible voices in one. They began with a murmur a clacking buzz and they seemed to issue from everywhere—

from walls the ceiling, the four dark corners echoing. They chanted and moaned and chuckled grim glee. They spoke queer words in foreign tongue, and through their interminable blabber a deep voice called.

"Warlock" it said. "John Warlock . . ."

Warlock's big body shifted in the bed. He thrashed and muttered in his drugged dreams, and from him came a long drawn animal whimper. Were those his dark hands moving, fighting off the visitants that peopled his sleeping brain?

The voices died. There was a faint clinking, a series of soft thuds and a metallic rattle. From some place along the wall Dex thought he saw a floating movement, and then the hair along his neck was prickling.

That laugh—that devil's cacchination!

It started from a sob's soft note and climbed to a muted scream. It shrieked in the ears, a werewolf wail from the world where horror reigns, and then was choked abruptly with a clearly audible *click*.

DEX'S green beam sprang out in swift circles. It illumined John Warlock, his mouth gaping wide and his beard awry who sat bolt upright in bed with his thick arms and great clawed hands futilely warding against this terror unseen. His eyes were open wide, but The Blue Ghost knew he was blind to all reality.

The green ray swept the walls, the ceiling, the floor and the windows—and nothing was there. Swiftly Dex went forward and snatched from the floor a small soft object that was damp in his hand. He gathered the small key and queer coins that had thudded against the bed and spilled to the rug.

He was safely back in the bath again before the hallway door was thrust open and the burly nurse stared in. The man glared at Warlock in bewilderment and jerked the door shut again.

The flash surveyed the trophies Dex had gathered. The coins were greenish with age and a square hole had been punched through the center of each. The key was a duplicate of the one that had unlocked the magician's handcuffs. His other trophy was a child's sawdust doll that had been dressed in clown's regalia. Now its tiny garments were ripped and soiled, the neck and an arm had been wantonly hacked, and the dampness that smeared the painted face was unmistakably blood.

He clenched a fist in realization of what those curious items would have meant to Warlock, waking from his hashish dreams to find them. The China coins and Johnny's doll with blood upon it—oh, it was cruel, cruel!

The creak of the bed—John Warlock's maudlin voice . . .

He had come erect, staggering, and the pencil-flash showed the blank idiocy of his face. Three paces carried Dex within reach and his hands slashed forth, left and right. His palms struck the bearded cheeks with stinging whacks. His charge threw Warlock heavily back on the bed, and with all his strength Dex held him there.

Again he slapped him, and again—short, jolting blows. He jerked Warlock's body, swaying the head from side to side. His fingers felt at the base of the skull, pressing certain nerves there. When the great body relaxed, he massaged the hairy wrists.

In five minutes Dex could whisper, "We've got to get out of here—now, tonight. And Johnny must go along."

Warlock stared up at him.

"We'll need Buff and Hagar and the

rest to help. How can we reach them? What's the safest way out? Where's Johnny's room?"

"Island—" John Warlock mumbled. "Yes—get away. Secret staircase next room. I trust—your voice Blue Ghost."

In ten minutes he could stand without staggering and his words made sense. He nodded comprehension as Dex spoke swiftly. A few moments later he was turning the knob of the locked outer door in a signal the patrolling nurse would recognize.

The door opened narrowly, and the man peered in. Warlock stood in the slant of light and his lips moved without a sound. He gestured towards his throat.

"Hugh? What's that?" The man pushed inside—and a dark arm reached from behind him to clamp his neck and silence him. He was lifted from his feet by a force he couldn't resist, and after that he had only blankness to remember.

"A touch of jiu-jitsu," The Blue Ghost breathed. "He'll sleep in peace for the next ten minutes, but we'll tie and gag him to be sure."

"This way" Warlock whispered when he had finished.

They entered the adjoining room, and Dex gripped the magician's arm in brief delay while his green flash beamed upon the usual furnishings of a bed-chamber. His interest seemed to center on a chair that was backed against the near wall. He bent to brush a clod of drying earth from the seat of it. The green ray climbed, and The Blue Ghost's fingers touched a hanging landscape in oils, lifting and straightening the picture.

"What's that—why?" Warlock said softly.

"I was looking for the Curse of Ka'ang," Dan told him.

At the other end of the room an oblong tapestry was framed. John Warlock lifted a small piece from the moulding of it, pressed a metal square, and the moulding slid back noiselessly. Beyond it gaped the maw of a narrow staircase they descended into darkness.

"If anyone tries to stop us . . ." Dex said.

A flicker of the torch revealed the thin blue mask he had donned. He smiled at Warlock tightly and his clenched fist gestured.

THERE was storm in the night.

From the horizon's edge the thunder muttered its threat of rain. The freshening wind had scurried away the ground mist, but the thick cloud massed above curtained off the moon and painted sea and shore in obscurity.

From the cellar depths of Warlock's Castle, the crag-topping House of a Thousand Horrors, a strange procession fled in less than half an hour.

Old Buff and his carbine led it, thrusting along the narrow path towards the edge of the booming sea-cliff. John Warlock followed, with a masked man at his heels. Young John Warlock, III, warmly wrapped, was held tight in the arms of towering Hagar. They pushed ahead so swiftly that the tattooed cook at the rear had to trot now and then to keep pace with them.

"Ditto went down by the short-cut," Buff whispered back in the wind. "He'll have the boat waitin'."

The great stone house was dark and unalarmed behind them.

Here were John Warlock's true friends, Dex Bradford was thinking. They would walk straight into the deepest hell of the red magician's dream if he had but asked them. Oddities of nature these servants might be, but

when Warlock appeared among them they had obeyed without question. Eyes had narrowed at sight of The Blue Ghost's mask, and Hagar's hand had clenched in a claw as she stared at him. But at Warlock's soft-spoken order, her skirts had rustled off to find garments for Warlock and to steal young Johnny from his bed. Even the boy had accepted the situation, as if his nature had been trained for these dark emergencies.

Hagar had carried him, warmly bundled, to the storage room below, and Dex did not fail to mark the look on Warlock's face when Johnny held out his arms. He even discarded his ivory prayer-wheel, that whirring protection against the ghosts of his dreams.

Dex thought of that small scene as the midnight expedition moved on.

The salt chill bit at them on the brow of the cliff. A white restraining fence marked the outer edge of this rocky precipice that fell almost sheerly to the jumble of rocks and spread of beach eighty feet below. The tide was making and the wind was ruffling the charging lines of surf.

A fissure in the rock marked the way of descent. Stone steps had been roughly hewn and a thick rope served to guide the hand. Thunder muttered across the swells and a spit of lightning forked the sullen sky.

Warlock glanced back uneasily.

"It's your safest chance," Dex said close to his ear.

Warlock and Hagar and the boy would remain on the island hideaway—so ran the plan. Dex would accompany them safely there and return with Mr. Ditto in the cruiser. He could hear the soft *phutts* of the motor even now, though at first he could not discern the craft in the darkness.

They waited on the end of the long jetty while Ditto maneuvered in. The seas tossed the small boat and thumped it, and none of them was dry when at length they were aboard and the cook's load of provision stowed with them. Buff and the chef watched them depart.

Ditto nosed her into the wind.

"It lies east by north," he said. "Half a mile we figure it." And Dex noticed how long association had trained his voice to the exact duplication of Warlock's. There were questions he had in mind for Mr. Ditto to answer when this trip was done.

The passengers sat silently in the rush of the sighing wind, the endless bustle of the sea. Dex was staring ahead, but his thoughts had returned to John Warlock's bare room, with the dead stench filling it and the mad voices whispering. Were the secrets of that room hidden behind the pleasant landscape on the wall next door? Had the same voices whispered on Contra-band Cay in Warlock's high retreat of the barred windows?

But there would be time later to unravel all those twisted threads. In two hours tonight he had learned more truths in this weird affair than the sum of all his previous knowledge. Once Warlock and the boy were hidden securely away . . .

"There she lies," called Ditto.

There was a deeper loom of blackness in the dimness ahead. Dittmars sent out his searchlight beam, and they saw the white fringe of surf against a rocky, wooded shore. The island seemed small and dismal lonely in the sea wastes.

"We can land in the cove," Ditto said. "A good beach there. 'It's—'" Suddenly he switched off the light and sat listening.

"What is it?" Warlock whispered.

"I thought I heard it, too," Dex said. "A slapping sound."

But even when flickering lightning lit the sea around they could see nothing.

Dittmars used his light again, and now the white indentation of the cove appeared. At the edge of the wood beyond were the outlines of a small cabin. In the quieter water Ditto cut his motor. The shore was not twenty feet distant, and Dex had crawled forward to secure the mooring rope, when the sharp voice hailed them.

"Who goes?" it called. "Stand by!"

And from the shadows at cove's edge two yellow beams lanced out at them in dazzling, blinding brightness. A voice exclaimed in gruff, profane amazement.

"Drop it, you!" somebody said.

But Dittmars was already reaching with one hand to start the motor, and his lifting revolver was jerking towards the spying headlights.

"Damn you!" he cried.

There was a flat sound, like the smart stroke of a cane across stuffed leather, and Mr. Ditto's arm sagged wearily. The revolver dropped from his hand. His head lolled back as he jerked abruptly, and they saw the smear of blood upon his face. As if a resistless hand pushed him he sprawled over the coaming, rolled into the lifting waters.

"Anybody else?" asked the voice from the dark. "Don't move, you fools!"

A second boat drifted out towards them, a smart auxiliary launch that had been hastily daubed with dark paint. Dex did not need to note the lines of the craft to recognize into what pirate hands they had fallen. He crouched in the glare of light, and his

wild thoughts saw no solution to this quick catastrophe.

"Mr. John Warlock, I believe," the same suave voice continued. "Ah, what a stroke of luck! You don't know how hard I've been trying to meet you, Mr. Warlock. May I introduce myself? I am Gregor Ivanov, and I have come to offer you any price in reason, sir. For some small trifles that happened to fall in your possession."

He chuckled. "Shoot down the boy at first resistance," he said. "Felipe—Sigmund—board them there! We can continue more comfortably, I believe, if our friends will consent to join us aboard *El Perdido*."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Torture Room

THE captain of *El Perdido* could not trust an inshore anchorage in the face of a gathering storm, he had reported, so now the lean yacht cruised into the gloomy wind of a course of aimless circlings. The daubed auxiliary bumped Warlock's launch, trailing in the wake and two armed guards were posted at the door of the main cabin.

The cabin was long and richly fitted. Its shaded lights gleamed down on luxury. But the scene within was tense and grim, squeezed tight by the hands of desperation, by ruthless purpose.

On the inner side of the long center table sat shaggy John Warlock, his bloodshot eyes staring in defeat and his tongue licking occasionally at lips gone dry and gray with strain. Behind him, on the cushioned lounge seats that extended the length of the wall, tall Hagar held his wide-eyed grandson and Dex Bradford posed limply motionless. The dark and striking woman at the head of the table dangled her small automatic carelessly, but the

slightest movement from any of the three made it flick instantly to cover the mover.

Gregor Ivanov sat opposite the red magician, and his voice was as full of danger as the silenced weapon that emphasized his words. He pushed aside the assortment of articles that a search had removed from the person of his prisoners.

"The two revolvers you will stow away, Magda," he said. "And now, Mr. Warlock—"

"But I tell you," Warlock said throatily, "I don't know what you mean. I tell you I have nothing—"

"It will pay you to be sensible," Ivanov said. "Let me tell you a small story to outline the facts in this mutual affair of ours. It seems there was a man high in the secret conferences of the People's Government—call him Maxim, for sake of a name—who was led to believe by a certain group of international agents that his own leaders had marked him for death. He did not want to die.

"At this very time, as it happened, certain plans of our enemies for which we had been long negotiating were delivered into his hands. Here he was, a man condemned to death unless he fled, and it seemed that chance had given him a double-edged sword to wield in revenge. He arranged to deliver these enemy plans, as well as certain vital information of our own, to an organization known as The Third Party."

"You're talking gibberish," Warlock muttered. "How many times must I repeat—"

"Wait," said the white-haired man. "They promised him protection and money beyond dreams. He agreed to deliver his valuables at a certain place, and bribery and disguise got him safe

beyond our own borders before the alarm was raised. He was at Mukden, a day's journey from freedom, when he learned that the Japanese held him suspect. They had not yet penetrated his identity, but they were watching him. He had to act at once.

"And that is why, Mr. John Warlock," Ivanov said, "that his secrets were concealed among your effects that had already passed the official search. Whether you were originally party to this I do not know, but your Mongol headman was dupe in the scheme. The papers were to be recovered when you had unwittingly carried them to safety, of course, but somehow the plans misfired. Maxim was captured by our enemies. Your Mongol was abducted by our local agents. And meanwhile you sailed blithely away with the loot."

"Then that's why—" Warlock breathed. "The footpads, the spying, all that ransacking—"

The Russian nodded. "It was a mere precaution at first," he said blandly. "There were others who suffered the same. Neither Maxim nor the Mongol would talk, you see, and you had almost reached your own country before it became apparent what had happened."

He leaned forward in his chair and the gun in his hand moved. "And now, Mr. Magic Man, I have come for your smuggled cargo. Where did you find it, and where have you hidden it now? If you are wise you will be careful how you answer."

Warlock's blank gaze turned in bewilderment to Dex. He spread his big hands helplessly.

"Perhaps he would remember," Magda said, "if we questioned the little boy." A thin smile slanted her lips. "Give me the little fellow, Gregor, to

coax for a while. I will show him some of my nice, bright playthings."

Her meaning was cruelly apparent.

"No!" Dex called sharply. "Don't try it, Hagar—"

WHEN the lights trapped them back there in the cove, The Blue Ghost would have risked a break beneath their guns if he had been hunting alone. But circumstance had given him three lambs to shepherd. He did not dare the dive into the dark water that might have meant a bullet for young Johnny.

He had been a docile captive caught in the trap, and Ivanov and the woman had ignored him after the first careful search and minute scrutiny. Now both of them eyed him as his clipped injunction halted Hagar's threatened rise. The gray giantess was gripping young Johnny tight, her face a mask for the Furies. The boy's chin was trembling, his teeth gripped tight against terror.

"Ah," said Ivanov. "Our pretty young man with the mask in his pocket and the burglar's tools. I am interested in you—but that is not important now. I think, Magda, we will confine our questioning to Mr. Warlock and his grandson. These others might be safer in our little brig below."

"Warlock knows nothing," Dex said. "You are wasting your time."

The Russian smiled. "I shall judge that for myself. Perhaps our bearded friend is a blind catspaw—and perhaps he isn't. Our rivals who searched his belongings are careful men, yet they found nothing. Why was that? Where was the secret hidden? Mr. Warlock might tell us if the encouragement is strong enough."

And suddenly there were harsh lines in his queerly youthful face. The butt of his long gun thumped the table.

"The Star List!" he grated. "We must have it, you hear? Do you think I would stop at death, yours or my own, if murder or worse would regain it? Think, Warlock! Cudgel your wits! Talk, if you love that boy!"

The illusionist's great fingers gripped the arm of his chair. He could say nothing.

"Maxim was cunning," Ivanov breathed. "I have known him since childhood"—his white teeth snarled—"and once we were closer than brothers. He would hide it in some simple place, in some article you treasured and would never lose. There would be no bulk, like those other fools sought for—a neat and tiny receptacle would hold it. There were cameras Maxim had, the microscope films that reduce a page to the size of a postage stamp."

He grated a curse. "Call those dolts outside, Magda. These two to be taken below. And you and I will see if the little boy can loosen Warlock's tongue for him."

Sadistic glee smiled on the face of the dark and handsome woman.

They would have no mercy, Dex knew. In their desperate, blind endeavor they would use their cruelest tortures on the boy. And unless he acted in the next sixty seconds . . .

"Don't try to fight them, Hagar," he warned again. Ivanov's weapon had swung to cover him as he rose, and Magda's automatic was trained unwaveringly on the giantess. Any attack was insanity.

Yet Dex found a thin-lipped smile for the Russian as he obeyed the unspoken order to come forward. His hands were spread, palms outward, at the level of his chest. His steady glance met Hagar's glare across the table, and all his intensity was in the silent message he broadcast.

"Keep cool," the telepathic vibrance warned. "Put Johnny down. Depend on me."

And strangely she obeyed. She lowered the boy to the floor and straightened.

Dex passed beyond Ivanov and halted at the end of the table where Magda stood. Her eyelids narrowed as she met his full gaze and her lips pursed thoughtfully. Dex turned slightly.

"What if you're already too late?" he said to Ivanov. "Suppose some agent of The Third Party—myself, for instance—has managed to step in?"

"Enough!" the Russian rasped. "Magda—the door!"

Dex jerked his head towards the tabled assortment of articles that had been turned out of Warlock's pockets and his own.

"Can the prisoner take a smoke along?" he asked, and his hand began to move slowly towards the jeweled cigarette case that coruscated in the rosy light. The barrel of Magda's pistol, swiftly striking, knocked his wrist away.

"Surely your valuables weren't small enough," Dex said, "to fit into *that*."

"Wait a moment," said Ivanov softly.

His sombre look was intent on Dex. His snakelike vigilance did not relax for an instant as he moved a step forward and lifted the thin, light case. He weighed it, fingered it, fumbled for the concealed catch.

"A smoke?" he said. "Why not? The condemned man always eats a hearty breakfast."

Dex extended his hand. "Would you like me to open it?"

"You are a very interesting young man," said Ivanov. "The Third Party,

eh? No—no, thanks. Just tell me how it works." He was turning the case in his hand speculatively.

The center stone of top surface was an emerald, baleful green. The same jeweled pattern was repeated on the under side, except that here a ruby's red eye winked. In Florida Dex had instructed Adam Wilde to press the emerald stone, but now he said mildly:

"The ruby is the trick. You press it with your thumb and slide it down—"

The muzzle of Ivanov's unwieldy weapon was not three feet from his chest. The Russian held the long jeweled case at shoulder height, but his attention never wavered far from his prisoner's expressionless face. Warlock stared at them blankly, one arm circling young Johnny's shoulder. Magda's automatic held Hagar at bay.

"Yes, I see," said Ivanov. His thumb bore down against the red stone, slid it a fraction of an inch. There was a faint click, and released springs jerked the case open.

The vapor burst of stinging gas* puffed out at the Russian's eyes.

HE HURLED the case and pawed at his blindness and tried to snap a shot at Dex—all three actions blurred in a single galvanic move. But that tiny click had been The Blue Ghost's signal. It had launched him into a counter-attack with a split-second start. His every move had been planned.

His eyes were shut tight, his breathing choked off, as his lunging body rammed into the cloud of prickling haze. He knew where his darting hand must seek, and he snatched the gun

* A volatile, based on the Barker-phosgene formula, that expands and vaporizes on contact with air. The capsule container used in this instance was probably the "gadget" referred to in The Blue Ghost's previous discussion with Adam Wilde. (Chap. II) M. H.

from Ivanov's loosened grip before the white-haired man could press the trigger. His shoulder crashed the Russian's body, lifted him back to sprawl against the table. The pain of fire was eating at Ivanov's eyes and a searing breathlessness choked his screaming throat to a crow's hoarse caw.

Dex spun against the table, twisting, and with the next stride he opened his eyes. He squeezed the trigger of the captured gun in the same instant that Magda shot at him.

"Hagar—get her!" Dex almost whispered.

The automatic spilled from Magda's hand. She stared at him in stunned amazement, with a bloody splotch widening high on her silken blouse. Then the long arms and strong hands of the gray giantess grappled her.

But even though she missed, her shot almost cost The Blue Ghost's life.

For as he twisted back towards Ivanov now, the blinded Russian lurched away from the table. From the drawer there he had clawed the gun he held, and by sound or instinct he was turning it straight upon Dex. It was shoot or be shot, and The Blue Ghost fired first. The white-haired man bent forward from the waist, ludicrously as though he were bowing, and toppled slowly down.

He would not rise again.

And even as his body was falling, Dex was proceeding with the final phase of his spur-of-the-moment plan.

He sprang towards the doorway, voice raised in a shout. "Aha!" he cried. "So it's a fight you want, dogs! Magda—the door! Let those guards in here!"

If Gregor Ivanov could have heard he might have admired the tones and brittle accent that were now repeating his voice in perfect imitation.

Dex thrust back the slide-bolt of the portal, froze himself back against the wall with the long-barrel revolver lifted.

They piled in eagerly, those swarthy guards, with rifles ready to quell the disturbance. The second man went down beneath a swinging blow before he had barely crossed the threshold. Perhaps his companion heard his grunt, but even as he swiveled his head around the same dark lightning from nowhere whammed at the base of his skull and pounded him senseless into black oblivion.

Dex jerked the door closed and leaned his back against it. His upraised hand cautioned them.

"Hush," he said.

But no alarm blurted forth on the outer decks of *El Perdido*. The sounds they heard were the wash of the sea, the whine of wind, the dark night murmuring.

"Tie her, gag her," Dex said softly to Hagar. "Her wound is bloody only, not dangerous." He gestured to the bewildered Warlock. "Find something to truss those men, and make the knots secure and tight. Hurry—we've got to move fast!"

He stood there tensely but his lips could still form a reassuring smile when he met the wide and admiring gaze of red-headed young Johnny, third of the Warlocks.

He had counted a crew of eight, and there were possibilities of unknown others below. Even so, the odds were not so great. His army was armed and ready, and the great advantage of surprise would be with them when they made their move. He tested the bonds of the three prisoners, added a knot at Magda's ankles. Her pain-filled eyes had stared at him unvaryingly since the moment Gregor fell, and she

muttered behind her gag as he rose:

"I know you, chauffeur. I'll remember you."

Or what was her mumbo-jumbo trying to say?

Dex faced John Warlock and grim Hagar. He pointed to the captured rifles. "Can you prowl quietly? Can you use those if need comes?"

"I can shoot," said Warlock, his big hand reaching. It was as if the shooting-down of Dittmars and the rest of this weird adventure had been the needed shock to return him to normality. His voice was deep and steady.

The gray giantess took up the second gun as if she were lifting a feather.

"Follow me," Dex told them.

Not a single shot was fired.

In twenty minutes dark figures began to descend the Jacob's ladder to the chugging launch that had been drawn alongside. Dex held the heaving craft as steady as he could. Hagar carried the boy and Warlock clambered after. When all were safely stowed, the smaller boat pushed away and circled shoreward. The sleek white ocean yacht, with all its riding lights gleaming bright and portholes illumined, continued seaward at a steady pace.

In the room below decks where the Mongol had died, five men were securely locked. Four bound prisoners rolled and thrashed in the main cabin, and the swart captain was securely roped to his bunk.

Meanwhile, the wheel had been lashed and the various automatic devices adjusted. *El Perdido* would be well at sea, provided the threatening storm was kind, when the prisoners freed themselves in the gray dawn.

"Give me the directions," Dex

called back to Warlock. "I'm putting you ashore on the island, as we planned, and then I'll need the boat for urgent business elsewhere."

Warlock clenched the flood of questions behind his teeth. According to the dial of the red magician's wrist watch it was then exactly nine minutes after two o'clock of a chill, damp, dismal morning.

CHAPTER XIX

The Lone Wolf Strikes

THE thunder grumbled, cannons beyond the clouds, and the pale spring lightning spluttered the horizon north. An earlier sprinkle of rain had fallen but the brunt of the storm was still delayed.

The Blue Ghost beached the launch on a sandy stretch southward of the gloomy wall of cliff and anchored it as best haste could. He clambered over a jumbled barrier of rock, and a jog-trot carried him across the hummocky strip of dry salt marsh that ascended to dreary woodlands beyond. Caution chose this roundabout way rather than the cliffside route to The House of a Thousand Horrors.

That name of the envious villagers was a misnomer now, Dex thought, for now the glare of knowledge was beginning to play on the manifold mysteries that had dwelt there. These last few hectic hours had produced the explanation of many things.

The Star List and the Manchu frontier plans—the desperation gamble of a cornered traitor-spy . . .

Here was answer to the midnight prowlers of Contraband Cay. The waylaying of the Wilde limousine in error, the suicide of the Japanese agent whose schemes had failed—yes,

the pattern of these was obvious now. And here, too, was the source of the worries and excitements that had trailed Warlock from the Orient.

But there were other mysteries that still remained unsolved. Who in the magician's household was piling man-made horrors upon the night-time terrors that had almost unhinged Warlock's sanity? And why—why?

Was Jill Conroy mixed in it—young Gibson? Was it jolly little Mr. Jolliffe, saturnine Dr. Strang, or some surreptitious unknown who arranged the plot from behind the cloak of distance?

In this new light on the situation the actions and purposes of each of them assumed a new cast. Their evasions in Florida had been, it now seemed, the natural attempts of a household to conceal from a prying world that the master of it had gone maniac.

The guards and thug-armed nurses, the dead man hidden in the cave, the tight-lipped secrecy and the sudden flight northward—all these might be explained as honest attempts to protect John Warlock from the consequences of his self-confessed madness. But the ugly truth ran deeper than that.

Someone had been scheming viciously, someone was living a lie. Did that someone have private motives, or was here the subtle tie-in of that amorphous organization known sinisterly as The Third Party?

All these questions would be answered, and soon. Somewhere remote in The Blue Ghost's brain was the hunch of solution even now.

With satisfaction he considered that the two whose lives were primarily at stake—Warlock and the boy—had been removed to safety now. He thought of the spy-list and the Nipponese plans, and a smile quirked his lips. Micro-films, thin and compact—a

clever hiding place for them in some small, unsuspecting article of Warlock's that was not likely to be lost or destroyed!

He was approaching the graystone castle through the spread of woodland that had concealed his earlier scouting expedition. In the damp and thunderous dark there was small visibility, and he gauged the speed of his progress to the smallest possible amount of noise. He was vaguely disturbed when nearness produced no gleam of light from the house ahead—Warlock's vanishment should have the whole place violently aroused by now—but he did not break into a run until the single flat slap of sound roused him.

From the darkened house—

A blast of gunshot!

He had reached the edge of the woods, was crouching for the swift dash across the lawn—and a nearer, softer sound jerked him around. In the gloom he almost stumbled over the body of old Buff, the toothless tent-show cowboy.

BUFF moaned again as The Blue Ghost raised his head. "Yo're the man with the mask," he whispered. "I recall yuh now. They shot me—my leg. I gotta get help—the law."

"Who, Buff? When? Where are they now?"

"A hull damn' gang of 'em," the old man breathed. "A long while back. They cut off the lights an' telephone, took over the place. They strong-armed ever'body, an' started tuh turn the house plumb upside down."

He groaned as his body shifted. "But I got one damn' coyote before they downed me. I was passed out a while—then I crawled out here—"

"Easy," Dex said. "Let me look at that leg."

His knife ripped the sodden trousers and his fingers felt the slow ooze of blood. With collodion* from his make-up kit and strips of Buff's shirt he bound the ugly wound above the knee. A makeshift, yet it must serve now.

"They're raisin' hell tuh uncover Mr. John," Buff offered.

"He's safe and sound," Dex said. "The girl—Strang—have they been hurt?"

"Not yet," Buff grunted. "You aimin' tuh bust in there, mister? I wouldn't if I was you. In case yuh are, though, I crawled out the same basement door yuh got in by this evenin'. It's still wide open—and good luck."

"I'll send you help as soon as I can," Dex promised. "Don't try to move that leg." At an easy run he vanished into the darkness.

He could see the occasional glimmer of a flashlight beyond the blank windows as he skirted between the cliff edge and the house. Lightning shuddered, and all at once the sea wind swept in the first brief squall of rain. Dex gripped his recovered automatic and continued on the deeper shadows at the base of the harsh gray walls. He stood a moment, breathing, and within he could hear the muffled sounds of the vandal-raid.

This would be the Englishman's yellow butler leading some cutthroat crew, he thought.

Softly he moved on, a wraith that drifted with the gray buffets of the rain. And it was the silent caution of his approach, the nerve-tightened deliberation which ignored no smallest

detail, that enabled him to observe the tiny flicker of light, no more than a firefly's glow, which seemed at first to issue from the very earth.

Dex made two swift strides and dropped to his knees. He drew in a swift, deep breath, for the narrow aperture into which he peered was a dust-frosted basement window. As he stared intently the inner light gleamed again. It flashed across piled boxes, a butcher's block.

Here was the store-room where The Blue Ghost had faced Hagar's cleaver. Here was the room where Warlock had reached out his arms to young Johnny . . .

Ah!

And there it was. The switching light had spied it near the door there—the small ivory prayer-wheel, the demon-chaser, the receptacle of secrets that all of them sought!

A fat hand reached for it, snatched it up.

And the watcher's breath was expelled in a soft gush of suspense. He could see the edge of the corridor door that was slowly swinging open. Instantly the beam was blotted out.

Darkness—silence. . . . The Blue Ghost crouched, a frozen statue in the drizzling rain. He could barely hear the voice that spoke from within:

"Who's there? Don't move—I've got you covered—"

A second cone of light blossomed near the doorway, briefly outlining a tall and bulky figure wrapped in a long dark coat. There was the shimmer of an upraised blade as this form lurched forward, straight at the light, and the echoing boom of a gun that the bare walls enlarged to rival the rolling thunder.

Dex was on his feet and running.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

* This first-aid remedy for stopping the flow of blood is also a prime requisite in basic disguise. Collodion at the edge of the eyes, for example, gives an actor a slant-eyed Oriental cast of countenance. M. H.

Handwriting Secrets

Character Clues in Pen and Ink

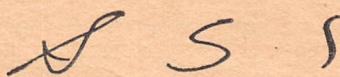
By Helen King

ALTHOUGH the variations, on the capital letters we have not yet discussed, are few — you will recognize many of your own formations in these illustrations.



Our President's signature gets much publicity, so perhaps you will recall the R he writes, in his signature. It is the first shown here, and is characteristic of a quick-thinking intuitive person. FDR plays his hunches, at least so his writing says, and if yours is like his—then you're a huncher, too.

The fat jolly-looking letter is associated with those who laugh at life and go merrily on their way. Little upsets them for they are given to good-naturedness and happiness. The third letter is written without the superfluous loop, telling us its maker is going to eliminate other unnecessary things. Quick; to the point; and active, you can expect this chap to be interesting. The last R is written by a man who follows out his own ideas and plans. If he says he is going to do a thing, nothing stops him. Fanatical about work, he always gives his best.



If you make an old-fashioned S, the kind with a long first stroke, it's dollars to doughnuts you fuss around a bit: are exacting and demanding. Your girl will call you careful, but a wife would dub it "always picking on something small."

The clean-cut looking letter is written by the man who likes to see things carefully and conscientiously done; who has a mind of his own and does not hesitate to let others know it.

That odd looking wiggle is really a formation of the same letter. Whoever wrote it apparently wanted to disguise the shape of a letter—typical of the person who never answers a question with a straight "yes" or "no." He evades as much as is possible, sometimes for no reason at all.



Although there are some 20 ways to write the small letter "t," the capital formations are limited. Here are the

three from which all others grow, so if yours is almost similar — that is, enough to look like one shown here, the accompanying explanation is also for you.

When two straight lines are utilized, stripping the letter of all curves, it is an almost certainty the writer will be in analytical form of work. This person sees through a situation immediately and knows how to make the best of it. He sees both sides of an argument, and is just as likely to argue on a point, just to get the other fellow's reaction.

School teachers, bookkeepers, and those who must be meticulous in routine work favor the second formation. It is graceful and neat looking—traits which these professions demand of its followers.

Does the third letter look scared? It does to this person anyhow, and it was taken from the writing of a man who always hesitated and hedged. He seemed to rely on everyone else for ideas, and disliked anything which forced him to make his own decisions. He's the kind of chap who never knows what restaurant he wants to go to; what show he wants to see. It's always "what would you suggest?"

U + V U + V

Because the next two letters are so much alike, the analysis in both cases is similar.

We were taught to write the letters U and V in the way first shown, and if we still do, we can add to our characters the words "phlegmatic" and "lack of forcefulness."

The letters which follow, first a curved line, and secondly two straight

lines, bring us more up to date. Quick action, clear thought, and abruptness are all shown here.

W W W
X X X

Reading rapidly from left-to-right, the first W is found in writings like Walter Winchell, quick—yet tenacious. Believe it or not, these people can receive confidences without imparting a word! Next, the scared-looking letter, shows too much reserve and timidity. Third is the manner now considered natural—frank, active and up to date.

Most people find it hard to write the X. Handwriting experts from all over count on this to trip up criminals. The line-up: first, caution, carefulness, and a liking for a smoothly run life. Second letter—action, ambitions, and ability to adjust one's self to the surrounding circumstances. And third, but by far the most interesting, a letter telling of originality; of people who refuse to let convention stand in their way.

Y + Z Y + Z
Y + Z Y + Z
Y - Z Y - Z

The Y and Z have much in common, other than closing the alphabet. They are made up of a series of curves and loops, thus tell of the cheer and good nature in our natures.

The first illustration tells of pleas-

ant, happy go lucky, cheerful souls. Everything is smoothly written—and they expect life to be that way too.

Next we have severely “drawn” letters. When these people marry these who write with the first Y-Z shown, the fur flies often—for these are the effi-

cient, critical and hard working folk. They can't see time or money wasted.

That third group shows altruism—plus. Reversing the lower loop always give a wide interest, great generosity and much tolerance. These writers come few and far between!

MISS HELEN KING,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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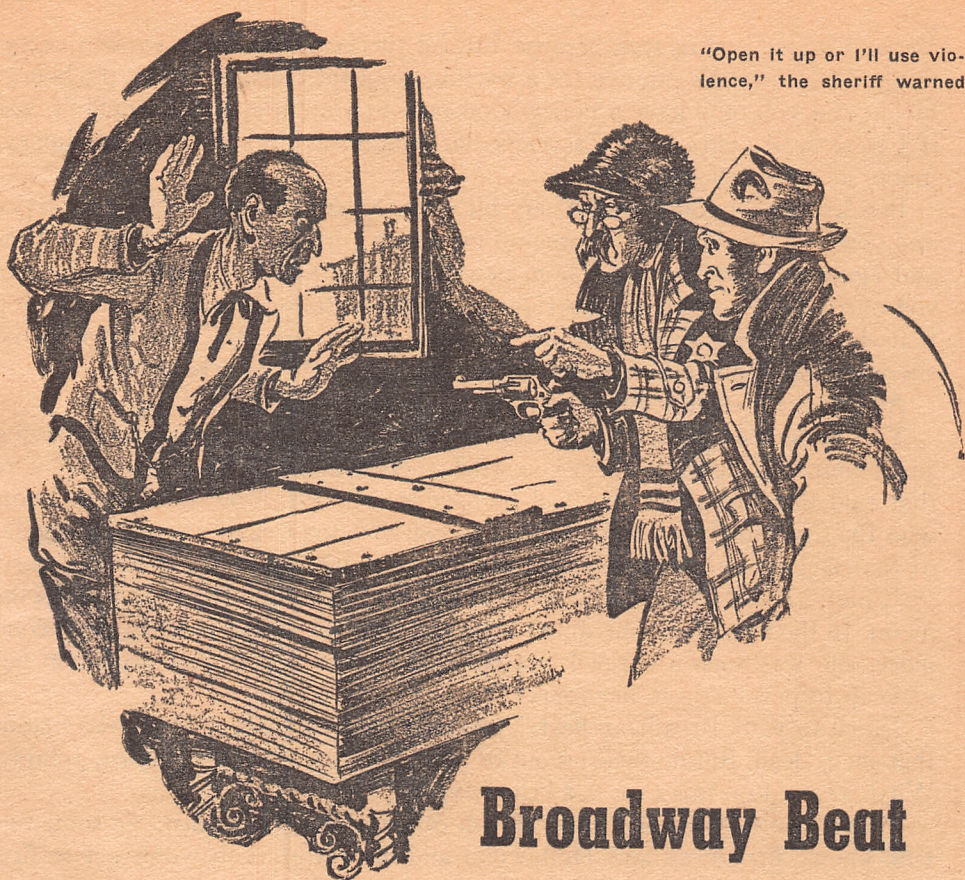
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"Open it up or I'll use violence," the sheriff warned

Broadway Beat

By Richard Sale

The story of a Broadway columnist who called the turn on murder because he knew the difference between an ice-pick and a gun

City Editor
The New York Chronicle
New York, N. Y.
Dear Louse,

Hotel Tirara
Niagara Falls, New York
February something or other

I have three wires from you in my hand, all of them firing me and all of them hiring me back on the newspaper again, and I do wish that you would make up your mind. It seems like you'd really like to fire me from the rag we both call home, but that every time you get your courage up to do it, you remember the fine exclusive that I sent in from Short Hills, and you get scarlet with rage and ask me to come back.

By the way, in case this is all Greek to you, this is Johnny Waldo speaking, the little dark guy who does your daily colyum called "Broadway is my beat."

Yeah, I know, you're sore because I'm off the beat, but I can explain everything. The *Chronicle* can live for a week without the colyum. I'm on my honeymoon, and you only have a honeymoon once in your life, and I wouldn't care if I were head man of the Encyclopedia Britannica, I'd still be on my honeymoon, and the hell with writing.

Besides, it's all your fault. Every bit of it. Next time, you'll take my advice and you won't go sending a dame off on a man's job. Chief, I've told you time and again that women make bum newspapermen, and this ought to prove to you once and for all that I am right. And incidentally, Gloria says to tell you that she is retiring to private life. In other words, she ain't any longer what she was, and you can hire a new dame for the job that Gloria leaves.

And now I'll start at the beginning and explain the whole thing.

You remember, a week ago Monday, I was sitting in your office, having just bummed a cigarette from you when there was a bulletin off the AP wire that said that Ina Crawford had bumped herself off. You didn't even know who Ina Crawford was. I pointed out to you that Ina Crawford was the spouse of famed cinemactor Dennis Kaye, and then you were all hotsoy about the story.

"Chief," I said, "that dame no more did the Dutch Act than the man in the moon. In the first place, she didn't have the guts for suicide, and in the second place, she was such a shrewd and colossal egotist that it just wasn't in her makeup to put a slug in her topper."

"Stick to your Broadway beat," you said with sarcasm. "The fact remains that she is dead. But no theories out of you. You're a gossip colyumist, Johnny. What we need on this case is a crime expert."

"What you need on that case, if you call it a case," I replied, "is some one who knows Broadway and Hollywood and has an in. You won't get to first base with anything unless your scribe has an in. Broadway is my beat, but I don't mind taking a flyer for the dear old sheet. Shall I head north?"

This suicide, the AP dispatch had said, had taken place in Short Hills, Vermont, which is where Ina had her winter sports palace. The place is termite-ridden with Hollywood on an east coast trip. I don't remember who started it, but some one made it an east coast resort in winter for west coast actors, and you'll even fall over extras up there. It's the place where they shoot all those St. Moritz winter scenes for the movies.

"Johnny," you said, "nix. Stick to your colyum. That's not a bad colyum, the readers like it, and it's your job. I should send you up there? Why?"

"That'll be a big blow up there," I said. "You could have a sweet story out of it. Take it from me, chief, it's hot, and it will get hotter, and with the right treatment, it will even push the very quiet World War II off the front page. Ina Crawford, if she didn't die naturally, has been murdered. And she's enough news by herself—without being married to the chief glamor boy of the day—to warrant a newsgathering expedition."

"It's a sooy," you said. "And a suicide isn't worth anything more than what we will get off the AP wire."

"It's a murder," I said, "and I've got money that says so. I tell you, chief, there's a warm story in Ina Crawford's death, and I'd investigate it if I were you."

"Won't the cops in Short Hills do that?"

"No," I said. "The whole burg is Hollywood financed. There's a picture shooting up there right now. Mogul I think. They'll hush it up enough as a suicide because they want no stigma on the picture. But if it's murder, they'll hush it up even faster."

"Maybe you're right," you said. "Maybe I ought to send some one. But if it's murder, you need a delicate touch. A woman's touch."

"Women are bum newspapermen," I said.

"Nix, Johnny. You stay home. This is a trek for Gloria Lindsay. She's just the one for it. Broadway is your beat, but Hollywood is hers. Gloria used to have a colyum right in the movie town—she knows all the movie people—some guy even offered her a contract once. Sure, that's it! I'll send Gloria up to check on the thing!"

"You're crazy!" I said. "Sending a woman into that nest of would-be Bluebeards! I won't have it! You said you wanted a crime expert. Gloria isn't any crime expert. She's only an assistant movie critic here."

"Listen," you growled at me, "I'm boss here, and not you. I can't spare anyone else right now, and she goes, whether she likes it or not, and whether you like it or not. And that, Waldo, is that!"

THAT'S as much as you know. From now on is what you don't and didn't know. It so happened that Gloria and I had been nursing a torch for each other for half a year and I didn't like the idea because I didn't want her getting into trouble. Gloria didn't want to go. She was scared stiff. I took her down to Grand Central that Monday night and put her on the train for Short Hills and I told her, "Baby, I want a telephone call, collect, from you every single night at eight P.M. I don't care what you file your stories on or anything else. All I want is you to call and say that you're okay."

"I'll do it, darling," Gloria said. Gee, she looked kind of sad, sitting there in her compartment. Compartment, you say? Yeah, you cheapskate, I know you gave her a lower berth, but I bought her a compartment. She looked sad, and when a redhead like Gloria looks sad, she looks beautiful. It all but broke me up. I kissed her goodbye, and she was off.

Well, everything went along all right until Thursday night. You will remember that it was on Friday that I failed to show in the office, and the old colyum *Broadway is my Beat* was blank for the first time in five years. Well, simple enough. Gloria did not call on Thursday night at eight o'clock. I was home all evening, and there wasn't a peep from her. By ten o'clock, I had a bag packed, and I'd slipped a rod into the bag, and I was off in a cloud of snow. It was snowing hard Thursday night.

When I reached Albany, I sent a wire to you telling you that I wouldn't be in in the morning. And then I spent a sleepless night worrying about Gloria, and what had happened to her.

Well, I was a dope to send you a straight wire for they got it to you in the middle of the night somehow, and you wired me at the hotel where Gloria was supposed to be staying. Do you know what happened when I reached Short Hills the next morning? It seemed like I arrived at dawn, but it was later than

that. I stepped off the train. A western union boy said, "Are you Mr. John Waldo?"

"Yes," I said. "What gives out?"

"Telegram for you," said the boy. "I took it over to the Hanover Hotel but they said you weren't registered there. So I figured that you hadn't arrived yet and I came over to the station. The telegram said to come right back to New York. That's why I figured you hadn't arrived yet."

"Fine," I said. "How'd you read it?"

"Held it up to the light," he said. "Sign here."

I signed, and he left. I held it up to the light myself for a minute, as the train was pulling out, and damn if the thing wasn't plucked out of my hand. I picked it up and there was a black hole right through the thing. I'd held it up close to my head. It didn't take me a second to recognize a bullet hole. I dove into the station and then had a look outside through a window. But I didn't see a soul.

Nice thing, eh? You arrive in a burg and some one tries to slip a slug into you. On that short notice. And it was all your fault, chief. That damn telegram. This kid went over to the hotel, and they hawked my name in the lobby and the clerk said I wasn't registered, so the killer must have followed the messenger boy and waited until I was contacted. Then, bingo!

I had the jitters for awhile, I tell you. What I couldn't figure out was why I'd been shot at. It was barely possible to see that some one knew that I was either there or coming. But who would want to knock *me* off and for why? Boss, this problem weighed heavily upon my brunette locks, and there were silver threads amongst the gold before I solved it.

I mean, after all. Just because I'm Johnny Waldo was no reason to slip a slug in my topper. Just because I was a Broadway colyumist. A killer would have a better reason than that. What was it?

Anyway, I went over to the Hotel Hanover or vice versa as the natives called it, and I registered and got a room. I didn't bother to unpack my bags either. I just got the gun out and put it in my pocket, and I started right off looking for Gloria because I was worried stiff about her. The clerk said that she had gone out on a skiing party with Dennis Kaye and a couple of other guys and gals from the film company which were there on location. And that she had not come back. I asked if Dennis Kaye was registered at the hotel, and the clerk said no, Dennis Kaye had had a little house rented for him by Mogul Films, and it was down by the lake where the town skated.

I went right down there, and I could see the film company shooting some skating scenes on the lake. I recognized young John Allen, the up and coming golden boy, and he was making love to Judith Queen who, I knew, was Dennis Kaye's most recent flame. That's what I read in the Hollywood colyums, anyhow. She was a good looking gal with a strong jaw and sharp eyes. She and Allen went through this scene, and when it was finished, I asked one of the guys behind the camera where I could find Dennis Kaye.

"He ain't giving out autographs today," the cameraman said,

"Never mind the guff, lens-cleaner," I said. "I want to talk with him. I came all the way up from the big town to do it."

The director came over then. He was George Blakewell, and he had a lot of swell pictures under his belt, a big guy with unruly hair. He wore glasses and he had an insolent sort of look on his pan, but he didn't seem to be a bad guy. "Who are you?" he said.

"Johnny Waldo," I said. "Broadway is my beat. New York Chronicle."

"Sure," he said. "I know about you. You said my last picture was worth an Oscar, and you said my next to last was worth a garbage can."

"I'll stand pat on those," I grinned.

"Sure," he grinned back. "And you were right. Kaye has rented that little brick place on the other side of the lake. If you're after a story on Ina Crawford's suicide, you won't get much out of him. He's sore as hell at her for dropping a little shady publicity on his shoulders. He wouldn't have given a damn if she had divorced him, but they were still married technically. He's all yours and you can have him. Drop in and see me. Staying at the Hanover I guess? Me too. And the rest of us hoi-polloi. We'll chew the fat tonight."

SO I crossed the lake on the ice and nearly broke my neck once or twice, and finally got to the other side and went through the snow and knocked on the door. Dennis Kaye answered the call himself. He stared at me and asked me what I wanted. He is a smooth-looking bird, chief, and he looks handsomer off the screen than on. And it was funny to see his lush California tan out there in the snow country. Really looked odd.

"I'm Johnny Waldo of the *Chronicle*," I said. "I'm looking for Gloria Lindsay who went on a skiing party yesterday and didn't come back."

"Come in," he said. There was a queer expression on his face. "I know of you, Waldo. Never met you. I can't see how the hell you knew she had not come back. That's true enough."

"Is she *here*?" I said.

"Yes. She's here. Come on in, for heaven's sake. Get her out of here, get her off my hands. There's something funny going on, and I don't want any part of it. I have my reputation—with Ina bumping herself the publicity was bad enough—I don't want any young girl being found drugged in my place."

I tried to keep my pulse steady and my temperature down below the point where solder flows like water, and I went in. I could've clipped the guy. Him worrying about a lousy reputation while Gloria was behind the eight ball. S'help me, chief, I coulda mowed him down.

Well, she was inside, and she looked scared. She was lying on the couch, as white as a ghost and when she saw me, she cried, "Johnny!" and she burst out crying. But she was all right. "Take me out of here," she said, "take me home! I'm frightened!"

"Get her out of here," Dennis Kaye said. "For heaven's sake! I can't stand a weeping woman. Get her out."

"Another peep out of you," I said, "and I'll clip you."

"Get her out of here," he said, "and scram yourself, Waldo."

So I clipped him. I mean I started to, but he was better than I thought, and he stepped inside my guard and popped me in the left eye and hung a lovely mouse on me, and then repeated, "Get her out of here."

So I took Gloria out of there and back to the Hanover Hotel and we went to her room and then she calmed down. I looked in a mirror, and that Kaye had hung a beaut. How was I to have known that he could fight like a tiger?

When Gloria had calmed down, she told me what had happened. She had gone on the skiing party up the mountain and they had stopped at a tavern way up the trail and had something to eat and drink. Then, on the way home, everything got hazy and blank, and she didn't know what had happened. She could remember that she had not gone unconscious, she kept moving, she could hear voices, but she didn't have a will of her own, and she could not remember the line of events.

"How did you wind up at Dennis Kaye's?" I asked her.

"He said I showed up there this morning after being out all night. That was around six or seven. I was cold and hungry, and he gave me some coffee and I rested until you came. I was shot, darling, I really was. I didn't telephone you last night, of course. I don't know where I was or what happened to me."

"Why would anyone drug you?" I said. "What would be the point? Did you get a lead on the Ina Crawford thing?"

"Not that I know of," said Gloria. "But maybe I'm just dumb. I never even saw Ina Crawford. They wouldn't let me see her. The village coroner said that she committed suicide and that's all there was to it. They're going to bury her tomorrow in the cemetery on the edge of town. There was some talk of taking her body back to Hollywood where she was born, but Dennis Kaye wouldn't hear of it. He said that she should be buried as quickly as possible, and right here on the spot."

"Gloria," I said, "I've got to get a glam at that corpse. I don't know much about that sort of thing, but that gal was pushed into her grave by another hand; she didn't stumble herself. And I've got to prove it. You sit tight here and rest up, and think hard, think of something you may have seen or heard that would make you liable for assault yourself. You must know something, or you must have seen something, or else you would not have been slipped a Mickey Finn like that. Whoever did it meant for you to freeze to death in the great outdoors."

"I'll think," Gloria promised. "Be careful, Johnny."

I WENT down Main Street to the town sheriff and asked where I could find the coroner and he told me the Short Hills coroner was just the same as the Short Hills undertaker, Silas Whipstone. "Fine," I said. "I want to confess to a murder. I shot and killed Ina Crawford and I can prove it."

The sheriff—his name was Tomkins—just goggled at me. "Crazy, son," he said. "Si says she killed herself."

"That's his story," I said. "Si couldn't tell an act of aggression from a self-inflicted wound. I tell you I knocked her off. Let's go see. I'll show you the bullet hole."

Sheriff Tomkins regarded me shrewdly. He was a tobacco-chewin' gent with a fine brown mustache, and we liked each other. "Son," he said, "you're runnin' a fust-class bluff here, but maybe I know why. Law says the coroner has the last word on a corpse, and Si, doggone, he ain't even let me see that dead gal."

Just shoved me off and says it was suicide. So my hands is tied. But maybe you and me together—I ain't so doggone sure she did kilt herself!"

"Sheriff," I grinned, "you're a gent, a scholar, and a smart guy. I see that we understand each other perfectly."

"Yes, suh," said Sheriff Tomkins. "You got here just in time. They was gonna bury her today. Let's get down and see Silas."

So we went down the street to the undertaking parlor, and inside we found Silas the Sorrowful, as gaunt a guy as ever haunted a house. "Si," said Sheriff Tomkins, "the Crawford gal was murdered. Here's the killer. Got him to confess."

Silas Whipstone looked amazed. "She weren't murdered," he faltered. "My examination—"

"—musta been all wrong," said Sheriff Tomkins. "Anyway, we got to have this fella identify the body and point out where he kilt her. Show us the corpse, Si."

"But the corpse is all boxed," said Silas Whipstone. "This man is lying. She died a natural death."

"I thought you said she committed suicide."

"That's what I mean. I mean she done it herself."

"How?" said Sheriff Tomkins.

"Why, she shot herself," said Silas Whipstone. "'Course I understand how you feel, Sheriff, but you were out of town, so I done the investigating for you. She shot herself dead. Bang, just like that. No doubt of it, no suspicious circumstances."

"I did it," I said. "Bang, like that."

"Yes?" Whipstone said with suspicion. "Where did you shoot her?"

He had me there, but the Sheriff said, "I ain't standin' for no foolin' around, Si. You let me see that corpse, or I see it with violence." And he took out a gun and fondled it.

So Si opened the box. The coffin was closed, but it didn't take five minutes to lift the lid off it. It was her, all right. There was a bullet hole in the right side of her head, which he had plugged and fixed up to look presentable. "She was right handed," said Whipstone. "The gun was in her right hand. I checked on that. Powder burns on her skin. A contact shot. Nothing else to it. I sent the murder weapon over to your office, Sheriff."

"I got it," Sheriff Tomkins said. "But I weren't satisfied."

"Take her out and turn her over," I said.

"Get out of here," said Whipstone. "I ain't going to despoil that corpse. I did a fine job on her."

"The wound didn't bleed much, did it?" I said.

"No," said Whipstone. "Didn't bleed at all. Internally maybe."

"Nuts," I said. "She was dead when the shot was fired. She didn't kill herself. She was murdered, and the killer then fired a shot into her head and stuck the gun in her hand."

Whipstone glowered at me, "Thought you said you shot her?"

"He was just talkin'," said Sheriff Tomkins. "How about it, son? What makes you so sure she didn't shoot herself?"

"Come here," I said. "See her right arm." I pulled the arms of the burial dress back. Her arm was long and thin and withered. "Get a load that. That's why she was murdered. The only reason that Ina Crawford retired from pictures was because of that arm. She was hurt making a picture a couple of years ago, and at first her whole right side was paralyzed. But everything came out of it but her arm. It wasted away, hopelessly paralyzed. Don't you guys ever read the movie magazines? If she had used her left hand, it would have been suicide, even if she was a right-hander. But she couldn't have shot herself with the right arm because it just didn't work, and the killer overlooked that minor point when he killed her and stuck the gun into her hand."

"By glory," said Sheriff Tomkins. "That I like!"

SO SI had to roll out the corpse and we gave her a thorough going over, and it didn't take long to find the catch, although it wasn't much of a wound. Inside her ear, on the right side, there was some dried blood. Way inside, there was even more. "Somebody," I said, "stuck this fair lady in the brain, by way of the ear-drum and inner ear. It would look like a needle or some similar unblunt instrument was stabbed in. Then the killer shot her on the same side so that any blood from the ear would look like blood from the head wound."

"What does that all mean?" the Sheriff said.

"It means," I said, "that a smart undertaker like Si Whipstone saw that, or suspected that, and complained of it to the husband, Mr. Dennis Kaye, and Mr. Kaye paid off Si here to keep his mouth shut and bury the dead with as much speed as possible."

Si gulped. "That's a downright lie."

"We shall see," I said. "We shall see. Come on, Sheriff. Let's go have a talk with Dennis Kaye."

"Wait a minute," said Silas Whipstone.

"Yeah?"

Whipstone was whiter than a tombstone in the moonlight. "Gents, I'll tell the truth. I really figured she had commit suicide. I didn't perform no expert autopsy or anything. But this man Dennis Kaye, he was so nervous about the thing—he kept asking if there was any indication of murder—that I—I took advantage of him."

"Aha," I said.

"This is the truth now," said Whipstone. "I don't want to be no accessory after the fact. I really thought she bumped herself, see? But when he asked me, I said there were suspicious circumstances, and that I was going to investigate. He gave me a thousand dollars to embalm her and bury her as she was. I figured I'd—I'd made a thousand dollars just by insinuating something was wrong when it really wasn't."

"Is that on the level?" I said.

"So help me, it is," he said.

"It sounds like Si Whipstone," said Sheriff Tomkins with dry sarcasm. "Steal the pennies off'n a dead man's eyes. Yessuh, I figger he is tellin' it truthful this time, son."

"And it's plain what really happened," said Whipstone, scared. "This Dennis

Kaye knocked off his own wife to get her insurance or something. And he wanted it kept quiet and a quick burial so's he could get away with it."

So, boss, the sheriff and I went right out and we crossed the lake to Dennis Kaye's brick house. The movie people weren't shooting anymore, and there wasn't a soul around, because it had started to snow again, pretty hard. When we reached the house, we knocked on the door, and there wasn't any answer. We tried again and again and no answer, and the Sheriff said, "The bird has flown the coop, son." We tried the knob and the door opened, just like that, and we walked in and found Dennis Kaye dead on the floor with a bullet hole over his heart.

Well, chief, that is the point where I first telephoned you to file the story. You remember, that was Friday afternoon late, and the connection was lousy. What I didn't tell you at the time was this. I made that telephone call from the railroad station because another reporter from the Boston *Globe* had blown in on a hunch, and he began to pump me for info, so I shook him off and went to the station to file the story with you and hit the streets before the rest of the country wised up.

Right after I finished talking with you, it was getting dark, and snowing like the old Harry, and I came out of the phone booth just as the Montrealer, a crack train, was wheeling through. It made a hell of a racket which is why I didn't hear the shot, but I was walking back to the hotel and suddenly my right leg gave way and I fell. I didn't think anything of it, and my leg hurt and got numb, but I thought it was only that I hurt it falling. I'm telling you, it was amazing. When I got back to Hanover Hotel, I saw I was leaving a blood trail in the snow. I yelped for a doctor and went up to my room.

I'd been shot clean in the leg. Can you heat it?

It didn't hurt so much, not even when the doc got the slug out of my leg. Of course, the doc juiced me up with novicaine when he did the probing. He said it was only a flesh wound and that it would be all right if I didn't make it bleed again, and he told me to stay off my feet.

That concluded Friday for me. Except that I sent the slug down to the Sheriff, and he said it was the same caliber as the one that Si Whipstone had taken out of Dennis Kaye. Wasn't that a setup? The murder of the most famous husband-wife screen couple, Kaye-Crawford. And the only investigating force, legally, was Sheriff Tomkins.

Next morning, the Mogul publicity people began to arrive to counteract the bad publicity, and I had a long talk with Gloria. "Now it stands to reason," I said, "that Dennis did not bump off his wife. The only reason he paid a grand to Silas Whipstone was because he was afraid that if the news got out that Ina Crawford had been murdered, his screen career would be shot to bits. At least until he could prove who had really done it. Dennis must have known she had been killed. He would never have paid out that dough just because Whipstone insinuated. Dennis thought, from Whipstone's insinuations, that the undertaker had found out she had been murdered *too. Too.* Get it? In other words, Dennis, according to testimony, was first on the spot, saw there had been murder, paid to cover it up until he could track down the culprit and save his rep."

Gloria said, "Then he must have found out something because he was killed."

"Yes," I said. "He found enough to prove some one else had killed his wife, and so he was bumped. What did he find?"

"Is that why he kept asking me questions the day before you came?" Gloria said. "He asked me all about Mr. Blakewell."

I sat up. "Blakewell? George Blakewell, the director? What did Dennis Kaye ask you about Blakewell?"

"Well, two days before you came, that was the day after I first arrived, I got in with the picture crowd, and one morning, we all went out ice-fishing, and I was paired off with George Blakewell. Dennis Kaye kept asking me about that. Even on the skiing trip, he asked me if I could find the spot again where Blakewell and I fished."

I said, "I don't get it. Why?"

"That's what I didn't understand? I asked Dennis what the heck he expected to find. I said there wasn't anything in the ice-hole except the ice-pick that George Blakewell dropped into the lake by accident when he was chopping open a hole in the ice for us to fish through."

Boss, did you hear that? My hair stood on end and I yelled, "What?"

"Yes," said Gloria, who is beautiful but not erudite as you can see. "Yes, George was chopping a hole in the ice and all of a sudden, he lost his grip on the ice-pick and dropped it into the water, so we had to fish through a little hole—"

"Would you recognize that ice pick again if you saw it?"

"I guess so," said Gloria, "because it had stamped on it, Property of Mogul Films. But I don't see—"

"You dope," I said. "Dennis Kaye went out there looking for the ice pick, and George Blakewell saw him doing it and got scared and knocked him off. Blakewell couldn't get rid of the thing, he was afraid of acting suspicious, getting rid of it alone, so he figured to lose it in the ice-fishing party. That ice-pick is the weapon he used to kill Ina Crawford!"

"No!" Gloria cried. "I knew Ina Crawford and Blakewell weren't the best of friends, but I never thought—"

"You knew what?" I groaned. "What did you know?"

"Well," said Gloria in a fog, "John Allen and Judith Queen were telling me the other night that Ina Crawford once ruined George's career when she was a big shot in her day, by having him barred from every lot in Hollywood by saying that he had attempted to blackmail her. It took him years to get back on top, and the feud—"

"Oh, glory on a linotype machine," I wailed, "lemme up and out of this bed." But my leg wouldn't stand for it, so I called Sheriff Tomkins and told him to come right up.

WHEN he came I explained and said, "You know damn well, sheriff, that the wooden handle of an ice pick is enough to keep the needle afloat, and George Blakewell was a sap to get rid of it that way."

"But it didn't come up," said Gloria. "He dropped it in and it stayed down."

"Nuts," I said, "it came up under the ice. Now, sheriff, you know that lake.

It has an inlet and an outlet. You scurry down to the outlet and start exploring the ice at that point, and your ice pick will be there, carried to the outlet by the currents of the lake *under* the ice."

By that time, boss, I was beginning to amaze myself, and when the Sheriff got back at noon time, he looked like something outa this world. He was lit up like a Christmas tree, and he held up the pick, wrapped in a red flannel handkerchief and he said, "This is what I found."

"That's it," Gloria said. "That's the same one. I'll swear to it."

"No matter how he cleaned it," I said, "tests will show Ina Crawford's blood on it. So we have a case." I called up George Blakewell and asked him to come in and see me.

He was down in the dining-room when I reached him, and he sauntered up leisurely after lunch and came in. "Blakewell," I said, "remember me?"

"Sure," he said. "Johnny Waldo. Saw you on location yesterday."

"And you saw me twice at the station," I said. "You are a very lousy pistol shot, Mr. Blakewell. Very very. But at closer range with an ice-pick, you are very hot indeed." I held it up, still in the hankie and said, "This is the weapon that killed Ina Crawford."

Blakewell smiled and sat down. "I don't doubt it at all, if you say so," he remarked.

"And that is the same ice-pick that Gloria saw you drop in the lake to get rid of. Gloria is right here, alive and well, and she is prepared to swear to that fact on the stand. Blakewell, the sheriff is putting you under arrest for the murder of Ina Crawford."

Blakewell shrugged but seemed amused. "Listen, gentlemen," he said, "you'll admit one thing, won't you? If Gloria Lindsay hadn't seen me drop that ice pick through the ice, you would have no case at all, would you? There isn't a jury in the country would convict me if it weren't for the fact that she is ready to swear that that is the self-same ice pick I lost in the ice, is there?"

"Maybe not," I said. "Maybe not."

"The whole case hinges on Gloria Lindsay's testimony against me, doesn't it?" he said.

"Yes," said Sheriff Tomkins. "It does. But the gal is alive and well, and I'm gonna put you where you can't change the state of her health."

"Uh-huh," said Blakewell. He pulled out an envelope and from it took a certificate. "But I would like to show you gentlemen this. It is a certificate of marriage. The other day, on the skiing party, Miss Lindsay had too much to drink, perhaps I did too, at any rate, it so happens that she is my wife."

"You drugged me!" Gloria cried.

"And I also beg to remind you gentlemen," he said, "that your star witness, your only witness, is my wife, and that a wife cannot testify against her husband!" He paused and looked very dreamily at Gloria. Then he grinned at me. "Are you willing to call off your dogs?"

"Nuts," I said, jumping to my feet, even if my leg hurt. "Nuts, my boy! Because in this country, you can't marry twice. Because that is bigamy. Therefore, since Gloria Lindsay has been Mrs. Johnny Waldo for the last two months, I would suggest that you tear up your certificate of marriage as an

out and out anachronism! It so happens Blakewell, that Gloria is *my* wife, and how do you like them berries!"

THE rest of it you know, chief, because I telephoned it right in to you from the hotel after Blakewell slugged me and tried to make a getaway and got plugged in the back by Sheriff Tomkins. But what you didn't know was that Gloria nearly got bumped off, and the only reason that Blakewell drugged her and supposedly married her instead of bumping her off when she saw that ice pick go was because he did not want murder in any form to hang around Short Hills. He had been lucky enough once, to make a murder a suicide. He couldn't try twice, with Gloria the second victim. So he figured to marry her to cover himself, just in case, and then divorce her later on and stay covered.

So it was a dirty trick to send a woman on a man's job like that. And personally, I don't see where you get off to raise such hell with me because Gloria and I went to Niagara Falls. I've been trying to get time off for a honeymoon ever since Gloria and I got secretly married two months ago.

We are having a wonderful time, and we are glad you are not here. Please tell us if we are still on the payroll, as we have had several very nice offers from other newspapers who appreciate deathless prose and a nose for news, and who do not ask you to take over the Lovelorn Colyum just because you are on a honeymoon.

Yours truly,
JOHNNY WALDO



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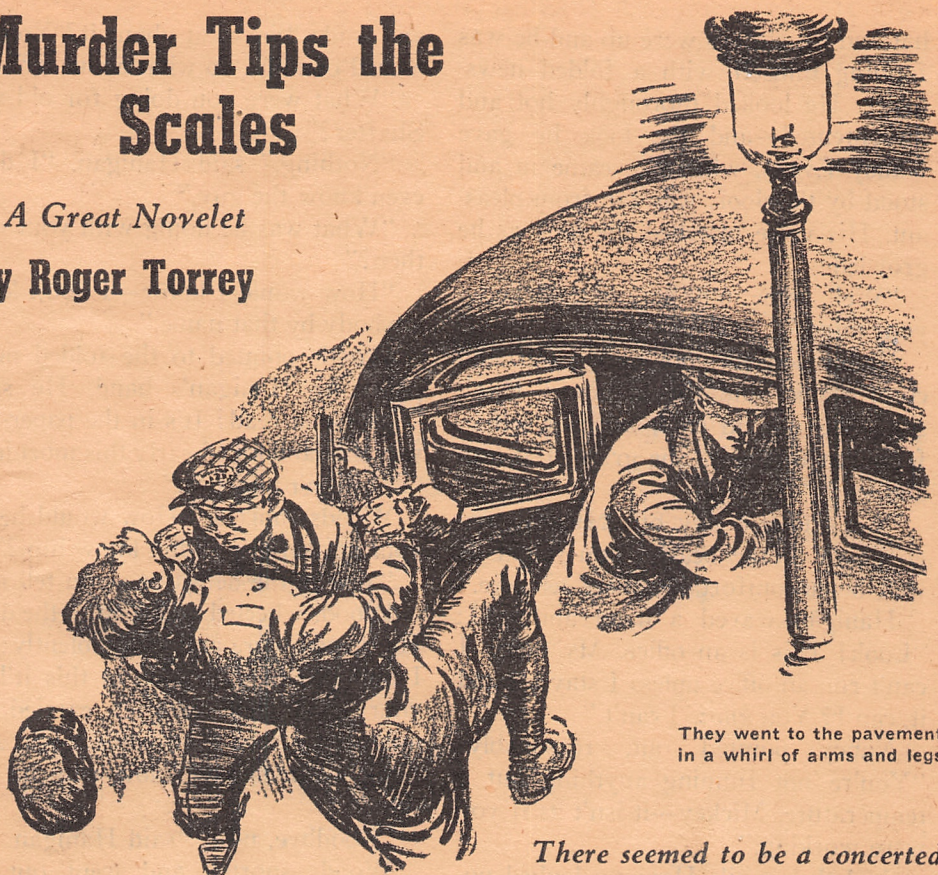
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They went to the pavement
in a whirl of arms and legs

CHAPTER I

It's Cool at the Beach

THE man went down the street with one hand pressed to his middle and the other feeling at the buildings he was passing. For the first half of the block he did all right, though he was bent over slightly and was walking in a stiff and careful way. But then he began to falter. He lost contact with the buildings and went clear to the curb before catching himself. He bent still farther . . . until he lost balance and started to stumble. He managed to make it to the corner before he fell—and he pitched ahead on his face

There seemed to be a concerted effort to atone for past injustice, but at the same time, there seemed to be a concerted effort to murder

just in front of the uniformed policeman who came running up the side street. The policeman kept blowing on the whistle even as he stooped over the fallen man. And then he straightened and jerked the whistle from his face and said:

"Jeese! It's old man Shafter!"

* * *

Hanigan was in his office, trying to decide on something he wanted for lunch. The weather had been hot for the past ten days and he'd lost all trace of appetite. His tie was hanging by his

hat and his sleeves were up and he was fanning himself with a folded newspaper. He looked thoroughly hot and discontented—and the look he gave Nancy Evans, when she came in and stood by the door, was far from pleasant. His voice matched the look as he growled:

"Well, come in or stay out. Make up your mind."

Nancy looked cool and fresh and comfortable, and this annoyed Hanigan. She was in cool, summer white, from hat to shoes. She grinned at him and said:

"Let's take a day off, Mickey, and go down to the beach. You might as well be uncomfortable there as here."

Hanigan waved a hand and said: "Look! This is an office. My office. I can't run an office unless I stay around it, can I? You *know* I can't."

Nancy pointed out, reasonably: "You're not running anything but a temperature, Mickey—it isn't as if you were working."

And then while Hanigan looked undecided, the outer door slammed open.

This time it was Detective-Lieutenant George Woods, who prided himself on being a very tough cop. He'd never liked Hanigan and had never made any attempt toward concealing this feeling. He went to the door of the inner office and stood there, looking over the perspiring Hanigan and the cool, calm Nancy. He said to Hanigan:

"What you doing here?"

Hanigan thought as much of Woods as Woods thought of Hanigan. He growled back: "Why *shouldn't* I be here? At least, as long as I pay the rent on the place. It's my spot, ain't it?"

Woods went to the desk and tossed a card down in front of Hanigan. "That's yours, ain't it?"

Hanigan tapped the card on his desk

and said: "So what about it? You got a card of mine, so what about it?"

"What were you doing for old man Shafter?"

"Nothing," said Hanigan. "I don't even know the guy."

"What was he doing with your card then?"

"How would I know—I don't know anybody by that name."

Woods pointed to the folded newspaper by Hanigan's hand. He said: "Can't you read? It's in the paper—he was shot and killed early this morning."

"I didn't notice it."

Woods snorted. "How would he get your card if you didn't know him?"

"You're the detective—you tell *me*."

Woods wheeled and went to the door. He turned there and said violently: "If I find you're mixed up in this it'll be your hard luck. Shafter carried too much weight in this man's town. And I got a hunch you know why he was shot."

"Goodbye, now," said Hanigan.

Woods snorted and went out the door. Nancy Evans said curiously: "That's funny—I mean about the man having your card and you not knowing him."

"I KNEW him," Hanigan said, "but I couldn't very well tell this heel of a Woods that I did. He'd want to know all about it."

"Couldn't you tell him about it?"

"I don't know about it," Hanigan said. "This is what happened. This Shafter called me and wanted me to go to his house last night. I did. Before we got a chance to talk about what he wanted to see me about he had company. Important company, from the way he acted. He told me he'd call here this morning at ten o'clock. He was shot about five-thirty this morning, so he

couldn't very well make it. I wired his boy, who's at college, and the kid will be home tomorrow night. That's all. I can't do a thing until I know something about it—and then maybe I won't *want* to do a thing."

Nancy said indignantly: "Mickey! After all the man was a client."

"He was also an ex-politician," said Hanigan gloomily. "He used to be a big shot . . . and he still had plenty of drag left. Sometimes cases like that are dynamite."

"And that's all you know about it?"

Hanigan hunted through his pockets and finally came out with a sheet of paper. He handed it to Nancy and she read:

YOU'LL BE THE FIRST TO GO OF THREE
—YOU KNOW WHY.

It was unsigned, and Nancy handed it back, looking puzzled, and asked:

"What does it mean?"

"It's a death threat, dope. Shafter handed it to me and started to tell me about it when his company came. He also handed me a hundred dollars. D'ya suppose it would be cooler at the beach?"

"It'll be swell there," said Nancy. "Haven't you got a hundred dollars to spend?"

* * *

Hanigan and Nancy went to the beach—and he didn't overlook the car that followed his own there. He didn't miss the two men who so casually kept him in sight at all times, either, and an hour later he gave a snort of disgust and turned back toward them.

"Well, Michaels! Fancy seeing you here."

Michaels said: "It's my day off. It's funny running into you like this, ain't it, Hanigan?"

The second man said: "You having a good time—we just been moping around looking for one."

"I'm having a swell time," said Hanigan, sourly. "I come down to get away from the heat and I get two coppers in my hair. What in hell does Woods think he'll make by this? If he wants to know what I'm doing and where I'm doing it let him ask. I'll maybe tell him, if I think it's any of his business."

Michaels grinned and said: "I just do what I'm told, Hanigan. What's the use of getting sore at me? Tell Woods about it—I can't help him getting ideas."

Hanigan suddenly grinned and said: "I'll tell him and that's a promise."

And then he collected Nancy Evans and headed for the amusement pier. It took him the best part of an hour and a trip through the Fun House to lose Michaels and his friend, and he acted very happy during the trip back to town.

CHAPTER II

Ten Dollar Job

IT WAS three in the morning and Hanigan had been asleep an hour when his phone rang. He snarled at it as he picked it up.

"What in hell's the idea in waking me up at this time in the morning?"

A low voice said: "Is this Mr. Hanigan?"

Hanigan said it was.

"Can you come to 417 Pine Grove Drive at once?"

Hanigan was now awake. He said: "What for?"

"I feel I'm in some danger. I'd like protection on my way home. Naturally I'll pay you for your trouble."

"I don't work for nothing," Hanigan grumbled. "Naturally I'll want to be paid. When d'ya want me?"

"As soon as possible."

Pine Grove Drive was on the opposite side of town and Hanigan calculated

the time. He said: "Okey! Maybe half an hour. That all right?"

The low voice said: "That's fine," and for the first time Hanigan was sure it was a woman speaking. The voice had been so low and muffled he hadn't been able to tell until then. He said:

"Okey, lady," and hung up the phone, then called the desk and asked them to get him a number. He got a man named Bernstein on the phone and asked:

"You got a game going tonight, Berney? This is Mickey Hanigan?"

Bernstein said cautiously: "Well, maybe a little one, Mickey. No dough in it—I wouldn't lie to you."

"Is Irving there?"

"I could look."

"Dig him out and put him on," said Hanigan. He held the phone for at least five minutes, and when Irving Kowalski finally answered, Hanigan snapped:

"Did you think I wanted to wait all night for you?"

"But Chief," said Irving. "I had the dice. I couldn't put 'em down, now could I, Chief?"

"Put 'em down now and get over here to the hotel. I'm in a hurry."

Irving said: "Yar, Chief. Me and the hack'll be right over, Johnny on the spot. I am glad you are up, Chief, on account of I'm hungry and the dice have lied to me. I am broke, Chief, and I am hungry, and I am glad you make the call. I'll be over, Chief, you can depend on it."

Hanigan hung up the phone and started to dress.

IRVING KOWALSKI'S rickety cab was at the door by the time Hanigan got downstairs. Irving was in the seat, smoking a large cigar and looking at peace with the world. Hanigan climbed in and gave him the Pine Grove address, and Irving got the cab shudderingly in

gear and started out. And then reached a hand back through the window and said:

"Cigar, Chief? Have one on me."

Hanigan lit a cigarette instead and stared at the back of Irving's head—and even this rear view showed him Irving was very pleased with himself. He said, in a cautious voice:

"When I talked to you you were broke. You were hungry. What happened, if it's anything you dare tell about?"

Irving waved the cigar, grandly. "Like this, Chief, like this. I get through talking to you there at Bernstein's joint on account of you hanging up the phone on me like you did. I go out of the booth and climb in the hack and an old geezer comes out of Bernstein's then and says will I take him home. He was in the game, Chief, and he was shot with luck. He was so falling down drunk, Chief. He says will I take him home and I ask him where home is and it ain't over six blocks out of the way from your hotel. So I take him."

Irving stopped here and chuckled heartily. He went on with: "I stop where he lives, Chief, and I open the door, but he don't get out. He goes to sleep, Chief. So I help him up on his porch and somehow he manages to drop some dough out of his pocket in the hack, while I'm getting him out. It turns out, Chief, when I count it, that he drops all he wins at Bernstein's and maybe a dollar or so more. Wasn't I lucky, Chief, getting back my own and more like that?"

"You didn't help him go to sleep in the back of the cab, did you," Hanigan asked suspiciously.

"Maybe, Chief, a little bit," admitted Irving. "He sort of come to, while I was helping him out of the hack, and I sort of stumbled and maybe my hand

sort of touched him on the chin a little bit. But he wasn't hurt, Chief—he most likely won't even have a mark on him in the morning."

Irving stopped talking then and swung the cab from the main road into Pine Grove Drive. Number 417 was a quarter of a mile from the turn-off and was quite dark, and Irving eased the cab down and said, in a dubious voice:

"Looks like your party's gone home by itself, Chief, it does indeed."

AND then the girl came running down the driveway and to the cab . . . and Hanigan had the door open waiting for her. It was dark inside and he could barely see her, and she said in the same soft hurried way she'd spoken over the phone:

"Hurry! You're late."

Irving swung the cab around and called back: "Where to, missus?"

"Just down town. To some restaurant that's open all night."

Hanigan said: "Try Benny's Chop House," and tried to get a better look at the lady.

She was small, and from what he could see, very pretty. She held her head away from him, and when he asked her why she needed a bodyguard, she said:

"It's probably just nervousness."

They made the turn on the main road before they heard the siren, but they weren't a hundred yards down it before the police car whined past them and into Pine Grove Drive, making the sharp turn on two wheels. Hanigan asked the girl sharply:

"Trouble back there?"

She said, still with her face averted: "Not that I know of."

Hanigan had, by this time, decided the girl was expensively if quietly dressed. Her voice showed she was a lady. He said:

"I can take you where you're going, if you'd feel any safer. You're liable to run into somebody, in these all night joints, you know."

"I'll be all right," she said. "I'll pay you now, Mr. Hanigan, if that's all right."

Hanigan told her it would be ten dollars and waited while she fumbled for a bill that small among many others. Irving slammed up to the curb in front of Benny's Chop House with a flourish, reached back and opened the door, and the girl said:

"Thank you, Mr. Hanigan."

She left him in the cab and hurried into the restaurant, still making the obvious effort at keeping her face concealed, and Hanigan said slowly:

"Well, I'll be damned."

Irving Kowalski said darkly: "That lady's up to no good, Chief. You want I should see where she goes and what she does when she gets there?"

"I did what I was paid for," Hanigan told him, "and that's enough. If she wants to play *Mati Hari*, that's *her* business. Yours is to take me back to the hotel so I can get a little sleep."

Irving said: "Okey, Chief. You name it and you get it every time with me."

CHAPTER III

Murder Makes News

HANIGAN had breakfast and the morning paper together—and the last completely spoiled his appetite for the first. John H. Somers had been killed at his residence at 417 Pine Grove Drive the night before. Neighbors had heard a shot about two-thirty but had dismissed it as being a probable car backfire.

However, people in the house next door had become suspicious a few minutes after that, when a car had pulled

into the shadow in front of their house and parked. This was, the man of the house thought, a little before three. He'd watched the car a few moments and then called the police. While the police were on their way, a cab had been driven to 417 and there had picked up a passenger—and while this was being done the mysterious parked car had been driven away, with no lights showing. Then the police arrived and during their routine investigation had discovered John H. Somers had been shot and killed. The police surgeon put the time of death at approximately two-thirty, which checked with the gun shot heard at that time. The police, it seemed, would shortly make an arrest in the case.

Hanigan read this and lost all taste for breakfast. Irving Kowalski's cab was so old and battered and patched that identification of it should be an easy thing—and Bernstein would remember his call to Irving during the night.

The article further stated that John H. Somers had been prominent in politics, until his retirement some years before.

There was more of interest in the paper. A gambling house run by a man named Solly Bernstein had been raided, after the police had been advised a game was in progress there. The informant was not named.

On the following page there was yet more police news. A man named Winters had complained to the police about being robbed. He claimed a cab driver had assaulted him, knocked him unconscious, and had taken slightly more than eight hundred dollars from him while in that state. Mr. Winters was positive about being able to identify the robber if given an opportunity. The police were checking on this.

Hanigan read this last article over twice and decided it wasn't as bad as it sounded. The reporter had been facetious about the matter because Mr. Winters, at the time of making the complaint, had been intoxicated. So much so that the police had carted him to the emergency hospital and a waiting stomach pump—and from there back to jail and a cell for the rest of the night. It seemed that Mr. Winters had been a well known man-about-town for the last fifty years—and the police had known him that length of time.

Hanigan sighed and finished his coffee and started for his office . . . and he carried with him the hope of not seeing Irving for some time.

BUT Irving was at the office—as was Nancy Evans. Irving was wearing a broad grin, and he said as Hanigan went in:

"Jese! Chief! Come on down and look what I got. Brand new—except somebody run it for three years as a private job. And I just the same as get it for a song, like, Chief. A Cad, Chief, no less."

Nancy explained: "He made the down payment on a new cab, Mickey. I saw it and it looks swell, no fooling."

"What did you do with the old one," Hanigan asked.

Irving said loudly, looking at Nancy Evans: "I traded it in, Chief," and then under his breath, so she couldn't hear:

"It's hot, Chief! I got it put away until it cools off!"

Hanigan said: "I read the paper," and went into the inner office, with Nancy following.

"I don't know whether it has anything to do with the Shafter thing you're working on, Mickey," she said, "but there was a man named Somers killed last night. Now I remember that

he and Shafter were together in a bunch of deals—they were in politics about the same time, I think. It's hazy, but I seem to remember something about a scandal they were in."

"I got the same thought," said Hanigan. "When I read about the guy getting killed. There should be another one getting it anytime—if the note Shafter gave me meant anything."

"But who, Mickey?"

Hanigan shrugged and said he didn't know. But that he intended to find out very shortly. He got on the phone and got a newspaper man he knew, and he said:

"Hagh, Joseph! There's been a couple of killings right together. D'ya suppose there's any tie-up?"

Joseph Lintz said: "You working on 'em, Mickey?"

"I thought I might get a bite in there someway. Can you get any dope on 'em?"

"Should I?"

Hanigan sighed into the phone and said: "All right, bloodsucker. If you can pick up anything I can use, it'll be a case of Scotch for you. And if it puts you in the hospital I won't be sorry."

Lintz said he'd get right at it, and Hanigan hung up the phone and said gloomily to Nancy: "I might get a little dough out of it, if I can find who the third man is and get him out of it alive. And if I can keep out of jail while I'm doing it. Of course I won't be alone in there if I go—I'll have Irving for company."

"Where'd he get the money to buy the new cab?" asked Nancy.

"The less you know about that the better," Hanigan told her. "Now all I have to do is to wait for Lintz to call back—or come up. He'll probably come up, if he's got anything, to make sure he gets his Scotch."

Nancy said: "I'll wait with you. Mickey, you look tired—you should get more sleep."

Hanigan thought of the bodyguarding trip he'd made the night before and said: "You got something there, kid, and no mistake. The trick is to get it."

GEORGE WOODS stormed in about eleven, and Irving Kowalski, peacefully playing solitaire in the outer office, sidled out as Woods headed toward the door marked PRIVATE. He slammed it open without knocking.

Woods snapped: "Now look, Hanigan—don't say you didn't know him. I mean John Somers."

"I'll say it," said Hanigan. "I didn't know him. I'll say it again—I didn't know John Somers."

Woods grinned wolfishly. "Then why, may I ask, was there a call put in from his house to your hotel last night at five minutes to three? Now don't tell me the call wasn't for you—I've been to the hotel and I checked their call list and you took it at that time. You then called a gambling joint that Solly Bernstein runs. You left the hotel at three-fifteen and you were gone about an hour. Now where, mister, just where did you go?"

Hanigan said: "Get an indictment and I'll tell the Grand Jury all about it. Until then you can go to hell. You can't tie me in with Somer's murder—you admit I was in the hotel at the time he was killed miles away."

"I can stick you for withholding evidence."

"What evidence?"

Woods got a grip on his temper with some difficulty. He said, almost pleadingly: "Now look, this is murder—I think it ties in with the Shafter killing. You know something about it. Why not work with me? You were out on

some angle last night—something that ties in with Somers and Shafter being knocked off. Why not tell it?"

Hanigan said: "Nice little speech," in an indifferent voice. And then to Nancy: "D'ya think this hot spell will ever break, hon?"

Woods made an inarticulate sound and turned and stamped out. And Nancy watched him go and spun on Hanigan and snapped:

"Sometimes you make me sick. I know you don't like him, but is that any reason to drive him into making trouble for you? You know he can do it."

"If I told him what he wanted to know he'd make a lot more trouble for me, hon. I *couldn't* tell him anything."

"What happened last night?"

Hanigan told the story—and added what the paper had said about a waiting car. He said: "As near as I can figure it, Sweet, she started to leave and saw the car parked there. Whether it was waiting for her or not, I don't know—she apparently thought it was. So she went back inside and called me to bring her into town. I didn't see the car, but with the lights Irving had on that old cab it's no wonder."

"And you let her out at Benny's Chop House."

"Sure. She didn't want me to know where she lived."

"You should have followed her and found out."

"Why? I didn't know anything was wrong—though I had a notion there was when that prowler car went in as we left."

"Suppose somebody identifies Irving's cab?"

"He's got it hidden. He told me so. Now here comes Joe Lintz. Scram, honey."

Nancy shook her head and said: "I'm going to sit right here."

CHAPTER IV

Lowdown for a Case of Scotch

JOSEPH LINTZ wasn't over thirty but he looked old and tired out. He was long and gangling and he walked as though he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. His hair was dingy blonde and needed trimming. He was losing it in front as well. His eyes were dull and almost colorless and he blinked them almost constantly. His hat and shoes were a disgrace and his clothes looked as though he'd slept in them. And he was, without question, the best newspaper man in town. He said to Hanigan, dropping into a chair as though his legs would no longer support him:

"I'll take the Scotch, chum. I'll sit right here while you order it sent up to my dump."

"You find something?"

"Enough for the Scotch. It was your proposition, cousin."

Hanigan ordered the Scotch sent to Lintz's apartment, with Lintz watching and listening to be sure there was no error in the ordering. When it was over he slid lower in his chair and said:

"Okey—you did your good deed and now I'll do *my* good deed. Shafter and Somers were in the contracting business, along with a guy named Schwartzkoff. They called themselves the Three Ess Corporation. A big firm—all over the state. Got it?"

Hanigan was making notes. He nodded.

"Well, Schwartzkoff ran the operations end of the shebang and Somers and Shafter got the contracts and took care of the bidding end of it. Schwartzkoff was just a working fool who knew contracting and nothing else. Nothing about the business end—Somers and Shafter handled all that. They went

along okey until both Somers and Shafter started going politico, and started getting State contracts right along with it. Then Schwartzkoff backed up on the deal. The boys had things lined up pretty—the State inspectors were under their thumbs—and they'd fill contracts with cheaper stuff than specified and in a cheaper way. Get it? They were making nothing but money."

Hanigan grinned and said: "I hear the same thing happens every now and then all over the country."

"You ain't heard nothing yet," said Lintz, stopping and clearing his throat suggestively. "And you're not going to hear anything more until I get a little drink. Talking is hard on my throat, sucker."

Hanigan dug down in his desk for a bottle and looked at Nancy. Nancy shook her head. Hanigan said: "All the more for me and Joseph," and set out glasses. Lintz went on with:

"And now for the pay-off. Schwartzkoff wouldn't go for the steal—he was honest and he wanted to turn out honest work. He squawked—but he didn't know enough to squawk to the right places. So the two highbinders gave him the works. They switched around his stock so he had nothing to say about what went on. And then they made it a hundred per cent—they let him take the blame for a bridge that went out during construction. He was in charge of operations and he was responsible. So he took it on the chin—five years worth of it. And Somers and Shafter ran the outfit for a year or so and made their clean-up, then peddled the business and retired. They were both just about out of politics anyway—even the voters had finally got wise about the robbery. So that was that. Now wasn't that worth the Scotch?"

Hanigan said: "About half of it, Joseph, half of it. Tell me more. When did Schwartzkoff get out of the can? Where is he now and what's he doing? And so on. Don't tell me the paper isn't keeping an eye on him, after what went on before."

Lintz yawned and said: "Okey, sucker. I guess you're paying for it. Schwartzkoff died, the second year he was in the pen. He was big and husky, and when he got pneumonia he went fast. That was six years ago, to be exact."

"Did he have any family?"

"Sure. Wife and son. The son was going to marry Shafter's daughter, before the beef came up. Then she busted up with the kid because he claimed her old man was a crook. I guess she knew the old man was, but she had too much pride to let anybody else tell her about it."

"Where's the Schwartzkoff kid now?"

Shafter tossed an address over. "He lives with his mother. He's been out of college four years now, but he can't get a job. He's driving for a guy named Winters. Winters made the jail last night for being took drunk, if that helps you anyway."

"Was the Schwartzkoff kid with him?"

"The kid's day off. I knew you'd ask about him so I telephoned Winters about it."

"What about the others? Somers have a family?"

"Hell, no. In spite of his money he never could find a gal stupid enough to go for him. He looked more like an eel than a man. Shafter had two kids—a boy and a girl. The girl's here and the boy's in college. Now did I pass, teacher?"

Hanigan said: "Sure, Joe, and much

obliged. It was just the three of them in the business, and now they're all dead. That right?"

"That's right."

He left—and Hanigan took the warning note that Shafter had given him, and studied it carefully. He said, in a puzzled voice to Nancy:

"The guy talked about Shafter being the first of three. Shafter's killed—that makes it come true so far. Then Somers takes it and it's true some more. But who's going to be the third?"

"It couldn't be Schwartzkoff — Schwartzkoff's dead."

"Who would it be?"

"Maybe it's some nut that's going to take out on the kid what his father did?"

Hanigan said: "And maybe it's the kid taking his old man's quarrel up. The old man got a bad deal and no mistake. The kid would naturally hate the two partners that gave it to him. In addition, because of the deal, the kid loses his girl friend. *That* wouldn't make him feel any better. I think I'd better talk to this kid."

"Can I go along?"

Hanigan said: "Now look, honey! I want to see him. I want to ask questions about him from people that know him. I want to get the guy's history, past, present, and future. You'd be no help. I haven't got much time because I've got to meet young Shafter when he gets in tonight and that's at seven. So go home and read a book or something."

Nancy said: "Maybe I'll go over to Joe Lintz's apartment and help him with the Scotch."

"Why not? He's a swell guy when you know him."

"You should have gotten jealous there, Mickey. That's why I said it."

"And I *knew* that's why you said it," said Hanigan, getting up and kissing

her. "Goodbye now, rabbit, and I'll call you when I can."

"Mickey, did you meet the Shafter girl?"

"Why no. She's got her own apartment I think—I don't think she lived with her old man. The boy did, when he wasn't away to school. Why, honey?"

"I was just thinking, is all."

Hanigan grinned and asked: "Are you jealous?"

"Well, maybe some," Nancy said.

CHAPTER V

Breakdown All Around

IRVING'S new cab was half way to where young Schwartzkoff lived with his mother, before it broke down. On a lonely stretch of road, at that. Irving pulled to the side of the road and said, in a resigned voice:

"The back end's pulled out, Chief."

"Swell car," said Hanigan. "At least the old one got a man places."

Irving said earnestly: "Nagh, Chief, why talk like that? I maybe got to put a set of gears in her." It's a matter of adjustment, is what I say, Chief."

Hanigan said: "It's a matter of walking, is what you mean. How much farther is this place?"

"Maybe a mile, Chief, right down the road."

Hanigan grunted and started down the road and Irving said: "Hey, Chief, you send somebody after me, hey? I can't leave the car on account of because somebody might steal it."

"They'd have to carry it off a piece at a time," Hanigan called back. "It won't run, will it?"

In a moment Irving came pounding up alongside of him, mopping at his face with a dirty handkerchief. Irving said:

"You was right, Chief. So I'll come along."

They passed through a small and neat sub-division and from there to a dusty little street that had uniform houses set back a uniform distance from the walk. Hanigan said:

"Not much money—the kid can't be doing so good."

Irving said: "One time, Chief, I just about buy a house here on account of getting married. But I'm lucky, on account of the girl changes her mind and goes away for a honeymoon with a monkey named Zinbaum. So that's how I know about this scatter—I just about buy myself a piece of it."

They turned in at a house that was just a little better kept than its neighbors, and Hanigan rang the bell. The door opened before he had a chance to take his finger away, and he saw a white-headed, red-cheeked woman who was holding a broom. She wore old-fashioned spectacles, and she beamed at him near-sightedly and said:

"Ah-h-h, young man! And what is it you wish to sell me. Though I'm afraid I can not buy it."

She had a broad and beaming smile and an accent so thick Hanigan barely understood her. He grinned back at her and said:

"I'd like to see your boy, Mrs. Schwartzkoff."

"My boy to work has gone. He drives the auto for Mr. Winters."

Hanigan had had a very good idea that this would be the case. He said casually: "Well, it doesn't make any difference. I was going to see him last night, but I remembered it was his night off."

"My Fred he work last night. He was here, with me—we were to the movies going—and then the telephone it rang and Fred to work went. Ah-h-h, all

hours the boy works hard. The man he works for does not sleep at night."

Hanigan laughed and said he'd heard that. He said goodby, after refusing a piece of fresh baked pie and coffee, and started back toward the sub-division proper and a telephone. He grumbled to Irving:

"That's that. I come out here and have to walk all over the country and then I have to call a cab to get back to town. Just because you pick out a lemon that breaks down all the time."

"Just once, Chief, just this once."

"Well, once is enough in this heat."

Irving changed a painful subject with: "You find out anything, Chief? From the old wench that wanted to put out pie and coffee? I could've used some of that."

"I found out young Schwartzkoff isn't in the clear on this thing—he wasn't driving for Winters last night and he told his mother he was. He was away all night on his own affairs and a man was killed during the time. I'd like to find that girl we took from Pine Grove Drive."

"And I don't blame you, Chief, a man's a man for all that, like people say."

"You dope! It isn't that she was pretty—she's mixed in this someway. She and the Schwartzkoff kid, both of them."

"She killed the guy, Chief. She was there, wasn't she? Sure she done it—this stinker had her there and she got sore and went *blooey-blooey* at him is all."

"Then why did she call me? Why didn't she just sneak away quietly? And what was that car doing, that was parked along the road. We didn't see it, but it was there, according to the papers anyway."

"Ask me riddles, Chief, when I don't

know the answers? You make nothing by it, Chief."

Hanigan went in the little grocery store they were passing and phoned for a cab. And when it came he said to Irving:

"Get your car fixed and stick around the office for me. I've got a notion we're going to be busy tonight."

SCHWARTSKOFF, from what Hanigan could find out from the neighboring chauffeurs around the Winters place, and from the stores in that same section, was a decent young fellow who supported his mother and made an attempt at saving his money. He had a girl friend, though nobody knew just who she was—and everybody Hanigan talked with conceded she seemed like a nice girl. Hanigan saw Schwarts-koff from a distance, saw he was young and blond and good-looking in a bluff and hearty way—and decided against talking with him. He had a notion that Lieutenant George Woods would eventually fall upon the same idea that he, Hanigan had, and that young Schwarts-koff would then be questioned in a large way.

He collected Nancy Evans and had an early dinner, and he met the Coast Special customers as they streamed through the gates at seven. He'd seen a picture of young Shafter at his father's house, and knew he'd have no difficulty in recognizing him. He was turning away in disappointment as the last of the crowd came through the gate, when a voice said from behind him:

"Is it Mr. Hanigan?"

Hanigan turned and saw young Shafter, who said brightly: "I guess I must've passed you."

Hanigan knew this wasn't true. He looked Shafter over and saw he was typically college and rich college. Good

clothes worn easily—a good smile worn the same way—and a firm, hard hand shake. The boy was around six feet and built accordingly, and was probably twenty-two or three. Hanigan said:

"Yeah, I'm Hanigan. I wanted to see you before you talked to the cops. You see, your father talked to me the night before he was killed—and I lied to the police about it."

"But why?"

Hanigan shrugged. "There were angles—I didn't think it best to let them know everything." He hesitated and said: "Don't get me wrong because it's none of my business, but your father didn't have the best reputation in the world. No politician *ever* had."

"He was a good Dad to me," said Shafter. "His business was his own—it's none of my concern. My sister didn't like some things and moved away—she has her own money. That's her business—she can do as she likes."

"You and your sister get along?"

"Why, of course. She's the best. Where are we going?"

Hanigan said his office would be a good place to talk things over, and led the way out to Irving and the waiting cab. Irving, according to strict orders, kept his head turned forward and minded his manners, though his ears were actually twitching as he tried to hear just what was said. And at the office Hanigan told the boy just what had happened—showed him the threatening note—told him about the Somers case and about the call he'd taken from there and the girl he'd brought away.

"Now there it is. There's a tie-up, I'm sure. D'ya know anything that would help me?"

Young Shafter shook his head and said he didn't know of a thing, and Hanigan stared at him with discontent showing plainly. He grumbled:

"You see, I'm in Dutch with the law over this—and your father was a client. Your father's private stuff is in his desk—why don't you and I go up and run through it. As soon as everybody knows you're back you're going to be busy with the police and with lawyers—and we'd have a little time now."

Shafter looked doubtful—and Hanigan leaned ahead and said: "Don't think I'm going to sit and take a beating from the cops on this—unless I get a lot of co-operation from you, I'll tell them the truth. They'll check on whatever your Dad ever did—and there's a chance they'll dig up something smelly. They'll make a routine check for possible enemies anyway, but if they knew there was a warning note they'd go to town on that angle."

Shafter said: "Hell, man, it's just that I don't know what's in Dad's private papers and I wanted to look through them myself first and take out anything that should be destroyed. Come on along—we'll do it together."

And when Hanigan climbed in Irving's cab, he winked at that astonished young man—and Irving grinned back happily.

CHAPTER VI

Four Hours To Go

FINDING the girl he'd taken from Somers' place in Pine Grove Drive proved to be the easiest thing Hanigan had ever done in his life. She walked in the library, just as young Shafter and Hanigan started opening desk drawers, and Shafter stood and said:

"This is my sister Mary, Mr. Hanigan. Mary, Mr. Hanigan is the man I was telling you about."

Mary looked at Hanigan and didn't change expression in the slightest. She

said she was glad to meet Mr. Hanigan, and Hanigan gulped and said he was also glad to meet Miss Shafter. They made conversation, with Shafter plainly wanting to get on with his search of his father's papers, and then the girl said:

"I'll go along—I know you're busy. Mr. Hanigan—I know I'll see you again."

"Oh, sure!"

The girl colored faintly and went out.

And Hanigan and Shafter searched through desks and papers for the best part of three hours—and found absolutely nothing of any importance. Apparently the elder Shafter had taken care of that matter before his death. Hanigan left, after advising young Shafter to get in touch with the police at once.

Young Schwartzkoff picked him up at the corner, driving a big black sedan that cost a small fortune. He pulled the car into the curb and got out, and Hanigan said:

"Yeah! What's it?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Have at it."

Schwartzkoff stood by his car and looked undecided. He cleared his throat and said: "Ugh-h-h—are you working for the Shafter's?"

"What's it to you?"

Schwartzkoff changed his undecided look to one of anger. He reddened and said: "Look! I asked you a civil question. I want that kind of an answer."

"You a policeman?"

"Of course not."

"Then go to hell!"

Schwartzkoff was in uniform. He took a hand from his side coat pocket and pointed the little gun it held at Hanigan's middle. He said:

"Get in the car."

Hanigan was enjoying himself. Schwartzkoff was holding the gun in front of him and in easy reaching distance from Hanigan. The safety was still on, as Hanigan could see. Hanigan grinned and said:

"Look, sonny. Aren't you getting in something just a little bit out of your line? After all, I don't know *you*."

"I know you. Get in."

Hanigan climbed cheerfully into the car, with Schwartzkoff still holding the gun, clumsily, on him. And then Irving Kowalski was past him in a rush and on Schwartzkoff. They went to the pavement in a whirl of arms and legs—and then Schwartzkoff was up and running down the street, with Irving in pursuit.

Irving had the gun and was trying to unlatch the safety on it as he ran—and he was aiming it at Schwartzkoff's back. He was paying more attention to this than to his running, and Hanigan's dash from the car after him brought him to Irving just as Irving managed to get the safety free. Hanigan got one hand on Irving's shoulder and spun him, and the gun went *Bang!* But pointing toward the sky. Hanigan said:

"That did it, you dope. Where's your car?"

"The gas station around the corner, Chief, around there. I take it for some gas and then I can't start it. I come back to tell you and I see this lug holding you up. So I come from around the car and take him."

Hanigan started toward the corner in a run. He said: "Come on, quick! Before the cops get here. That shot'll get 'em here fast."

Irving panted along, saying: "Chief, we can't get away in the hack—she won't run."

"We can call one that will, dope. Put that gun away—no, give it to me."

HANIGAN didn't see either of the Shafter or young Schwartzkoff for the next two days, and he didn't look for them. The third morning he was alone in his office when Woods came in and said:

"We got the gun that killed Somers. What d'ya know about it?"

Hanigan said he knew nothing about it and looked innocent. Woods looked suspicious, and went on with:

"It came in the mail, addressed to me. It had been taken apart and cleaned—even the shells in it were wiped dry. Not a print on it. A .25 automatic."

Hanigan pointed out: "Prints wouldn't help you anyway, unless you had a suspect to match 'em up with. Unless it happened to be somebody in the files."

"I got the suspect," Woods said. "I been working. Did you send me that gun?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"There's a lot about this you don't seem to know anything about. You working for Shafter on this?"

"Well, some. There don't seem to be any place to start. Ballistics said it was the right gun, eh, this one that somebody sent you? It matched up with the slugs taken out of Somers?"

"Yeah! If you're working for the Shafter kid you'd better get busy. I'm going to have him in jail for the Somers kill."

Hanigan looked interested. "That right? I suppose he killed his old man, too. Or don't the two go together?"

"Somers killed the kid's old man—I've got that proved. I got a witness that saw them together just before the shooting. They were walking down the street together and they were quarreling all over the place. He heard shots then and saw Somers run away. He identified the body as Somers—or as

Somers being the man he saw running. And Shafter, too."

"And the kid took up the old man's battle? He was at school, wasn't he?"

Woods said, in a very satisfied voice: "That's how come you guys never get any place on anything but a set-up. He wasn't at school—he'd come home the day before. When you wired him they forwarded the wire back to him here. See?"

Hanigan nodded thoughtfully and didn't look surprised.

"And the kid's been jammed for money and his old man wasn't giving him much. I figure he went to Somers and tried to hold him up for dough, maybe, and then shot him during the argument. Somers was tighter than the bark on a tree. Or maybe he just killed him because Somers had killed his old man. We'll sweat out how it happened, all right."

Hanigan said: "Well, outside of it being all wrong, it's a good thought, Woods. It's got a motive, I'll admit. And it ties in with some other things, maybe. But it's still wrong."

"I knew it," Woods said triumphantly. "I knew you were holding back. Now tell me what you know."

"Now you've come roaring into this office once too many times," said Hanigan. "I'm not going to tell you a thing. But I'll bring you the person that did the killing and I'll bring you a confession along with it and I'll do it inside of four hours. Now what about that?"

"You'll talk right now."

"I will not. And there's no way you can make me."

"Why not talk?"

Hanigan grinned and said: "And talk myself out of a chance for money? Why be simple, Lieutenant? I went in this for money and I haven't got any yet."

CHAPTER VII

An Amateur Job

MARY SHAFTER had been crying. Her nose was pink, her eyes were red, and her cheeks were swollen.

"I don't know what to say to you, Mr. Hanigan," she said.

Hanigan said: "Let me say it for you. Your brother was in town and you knew it. Both you and your brother knew your father had been over at Somers' place, all night, trying to straighten out a business deal that had gone sour. It had gone sour for you—the Schwartskoff boy had quit you because your father and Somers had gypped his dad."

"That isn't so—we—we were going around together again."

"Ah-h-h-h," said Hanigan. "That makes it plain. Your father was arguing with Somers about making some adjustment with the kid and his mother then. He knew about this romance of yours and was trying to straighten it out."

"Well, yes. But . . . but we didn't know that Somers killed dad. Not until you just told me. My brother thought it was possible."

Hanigan pounced on this. He said: "That's why Woods is going to arrest him. That's his motive for the killing."

"He didn't do it. He wouldn't do a thing like that. He's just a boy."

"Then what are you trying to protect him for?" said Hanigan softly. "You went to Somers' house, knowing your brother might have gone there. You went in and found him and decided your brother had killed him. How'd you go there?"

"In a cab. But my brother didn't kill him—I know he couldn't do a thing like that. But he'd made threats—it looks bad. What will I do?"

Hanigan said: "I'll leave the fee up to you if I clear him. How about it?"

"If you only could."

"There's just one thing. Where did you find the gun you gave young Schwartzkoff? I know you gave it to him. He followed your cab that night, guessing where you were going. Or not?"

Mary Shafter looked startled. She said: "But I didn't see him that night. That is, not that late. I saw him early in the evening."

"Did he know anything about the mess?"

"Why, my brother and he and I talked it all over. Of course. My father owed him and his mother a moral debt, even if not legal, and we were going to take care of it when dad's estate was settled. We're going to be married in the fall."

"When did you give him the gun?"

"Why the next morning. It was right by Mr. Somers and I picked it up. I thought—well I thought it would be dangerous to keep it."

"Dangerous for you, or your brother?"

And Hanigan stood and said: "Don't fret. It's a mess, but it will work out. I don't think anybody will be hurt too bad, either."

YOUNG Schwartzkoff opened the door himself and stood staring out at Hanigan. His mother said, from inside:

"Who is it, Donnie?"

Hanigan said: "Inside. I want to talk to you," and Schwartzkoff stepped back as Hanigan followed him in. Mrs. Schwartzkoff said, in a happy voice:

"Ach, Donnie, it is your friend, who to you came to see. Hello, mister."

Hanigan said: "I came alone . . . there's no need of us having any more

trouble about this thing than we can help. There'll be trouble enough."

Schwartzkoff was looking as ugly as his good-natured face would allow. He said: "Making trouble about that gun, eh?"

Hanigan said: "I sent it to the cops. They checked it out as the same gun that killed Somers. *They'll* make the trouble for you, baby. They *hang* people for that kind of trouble."

Mrs. Schwartzkoff said: "Ach-ch! What is this man saying, Donnie?"

Hanigan said: "I'm taking him down to the station on a murder charge, ma'am. I'm sorry, but it's open and shut against him."

Mrs. Schwartzkoff no longer looked gentle and old-fashioned. She *did* look motherly, in the same manner a tigress defending her cubs would appear. She said, her accent even stronger:

"You will tell me of this."

Hanigan said: "It's simple. Your son was hanging around the Somers' place, around the time Somers was shot and killed. He tried to hold me up with a gun after that and lost the gun. I sent the gun to the police and they've proved it was the one used to kill Somers. Somers gypped you people out of a lot of dough, and the boy wanted to get married. He undoubtedly tried to get Somers to kick through with what he thought was coming to him and he shot and killed him when Somers backed up on it. It's open and shut—it's as pretty a police case as they ever took to court."

"Except," said Mrs. Schwartzkoff, speaking slowly and distinctly, "except that I was the one who shot Mr. Somers. I didn't mean to do it—I meant to scare him. But I do not know anything about firearms and I made a mistake and the gun shot."

Schwartzkoff was staring at his mother as though he'd never laid eyes

on her before. He said, dazedly:

"Why, ma!"

And Hanigan said to him: "It was the only sure way I could get her to tell the truth. Don't fret—she probably won't even go to trial. After what Somers did, and the reputation he's got, everybody's going to try and pin a medal on your mother."

HANIGAN was sitting in Joe Lintz's apartment, helping Lintz work on the Scotch. Nancy Evans was in the kitchenette, trying to make delicatessen food look like something home-made . . . and listening intently. Lintz said:

"I get it, Mickey. The old sister finds out sonny wants to get himself a frau. He's got no dough and that's holding him back. So she goes over to the guy that beat her old man out of a bunch and tries to put the slug on him, and during the excitement she knocks him off. She should be praised for that deed and I'm raising my voice in praise, accordingly. But how in the hell did the Shafter young'uns get mixed up in it?"

Hanigan said: "Well, sister Shafter got the same idea—or thought her brother had it. They had a damn' good notion that Somers was mixed up in their old man's murder because they knew the two of them were rowing about something and that the old man was going over that night to see Somers. Hell, Joe, their old man was trying to get Somers to divvy up with the Schwartskoffs, the same as Mrs. Schwartskoff was. He'd found out his gal was going to marry the Schwartskoff kid and he was trying to give 'em a start in life."

"He had enough dough, why didn't he?"

"He wanted Somers to stand half the cost, dope. So the gal goes over there and finds him dead and thinks her

brother did it. She looks out and sees a car drive up and don't know it's young Schwartskoff keeping an eye on her. She goes panicky and calls me. Schwartskoff drives off when he sees she's all right. Then the next day it breaks and he thinks she did it. She thought her brother did it and Schwartskoff thought she did it and the brother didn't care a damn. He didn't even know sister had been there."

Nancy said, from the kitchen: "How'd *you* figure it out, smarty? Why'd you think it was the mother?"

Hanigan laughed and said: "That was easy. Schwartskoff is scared stiff, but not for himself. For the girl. The girl was scared stiff, but she wouldn't have stuck around that house, if she'd done the killing. So it meant she was worried about somebody else. Now if it wasn't Schwartskoff it must have been the brother. And the brother wasn't worried about anything or he wouldn't have hired a detective to help him find out the answers. He'd have figured the detective might find out and if he'd been guilty he'd be throwing himself to the wolves. So that left the old lady—she was the only other one in the mix-up."

"It could have been over some old steal that Somers and Shafter were in," objected Lintz.

"It could not," said Hanigan. "It wasn't a premeditated thing. No man planning on a killing would take a pop-gun like a .25 to do it with. And after the killing they wouldn't have dropped it. That made it all the more likely the old lady was the one. It was caused by an old steal, all right, but it was a steal that was just coming to a head—the kid had to have money to get married on, the old lady thought."

Nancy said: "It *still* don't track. What about the warning note that Shafter gave you?"

"He wrote it himself. He knew he was going to have trouble with Somers and he wanted a bodyguard. He didn't want anybody to know Somers was the one he was afraid of because it would just revive the old scandal. That's simple. When do we eat?"

"When Irving gets here. Just the same; it looked bad for both the sister and brother and for the sweetheart. The old lady will go clear on it, I'm willing to bet."

Hanigan laughed and said: "I tried to bet George Woods the same thing and he wouldn't take me up on it."

And then Irving knocked on the door and came in. He wore a scowl, he was covered with grease from head to foot, and he had a black eye. His chin was a little swollen . . . and altogether he looked a wreck. Hanigan stared at him and asked:

"What did you run into?"

Irving said bitterly: "It broke down again and I'm underneath it, putting it back together. A guy comes by and stops and says can he help me. I say yes. That's all there was to it, Chief. I crawl out from under and it's the bozo that went to sleep in my hack, the one I take home from Bernstein's the other night. He's got the same punk driving for him that you and me took the gun away from the other day. A big guy,

Chief, and no mistake. A tough guy, when he's right. I find it out.

"The guy that loses the dough yelps and says I'm the one that takes it and the big guy works me over before I can pick up a wrench, and I got a couple laying there handy. I don't get an even break—I'm down and then I'm up and then I'm down again. And then, Chief, the guy goes through me and takes what dough I got and they say I got to pay what I didn't have from what I took—I mean found—I got to pay that so much a week back to 'em. Or I go to jail, like I was a criminal like. And they drive away looking like they're happy, Chief, but I'm not happy at all. It shows me a lesson, Chief."

Nancy said: "I got it. You've found out it doesn't pay to roll the customers. That it?"

"Hell, no," said Irving. "It shows me a lesson that I shouldn't be crawling around underneath a car when trouble comes along. I should be prepared, like an army. I don't lose then. Rolling : drunk is legit business in my line."

Lintz stopped laughing long enough to say: "Don't look my way now, baby—I won't be ripe for rolling for another two hours."

And Hanigan said: "Don't worry, Joe, he'll be waiting. He's got to get even someday."

COMING NEXT WEEK

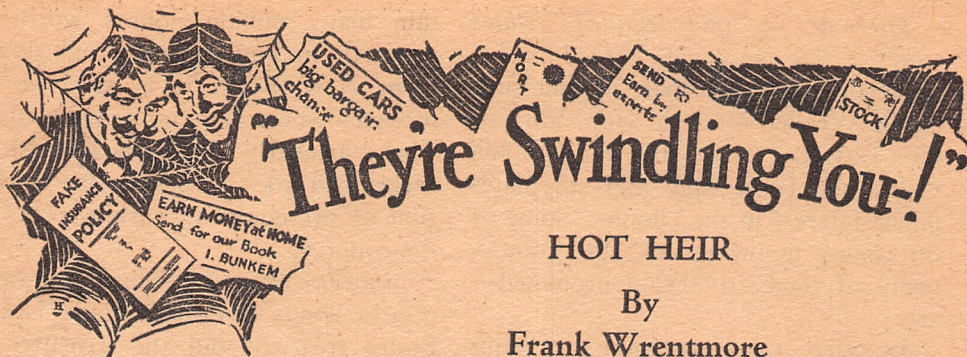
**Daffy Dill buys a pink cat that leads him
on a red murder trail**

A fast novelet by

RICHARD SALE

Detective Fiction Weekly

(On Sale Next Wednesday, Feb. 21)



HOT HEIR

By
Frank Wrentmore

This is the two-hundred-and-twenty-sixth of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

ONE day last summer two men from the middle west appeared at the New York District Attorney's office with a letter of introduction to Mr. Dewey from a Mr. Big in their home town. An assistant, after convincing them that Mr. Dewey was actually out of the city, and after a lot of skirmishing around, finally learned their errand.

"We want Mr. Dewey to recommend a dependable lawyer in New York to do some important research work in connection with an estate."

"I see," said the assistant, "and what is the name of the estate?"

"Edwards, and it's worth millions," one of them replied.

"Do you mean *the* Edwards Estate, the one that claims millions of dollars worth of property in New York City?"

"The same."

The assistant called the filing department, got the files on estate swindles and then spent the next two hours trying to prove to two obstinate men that they were on their way to becoming the victims of a fraud. He thinks he wasn't successful and the two left his

office believing that the district attorney was part of a conspiracy to cheat them out of an inheritance.

Well, most of them are like that. No matter how conclusive the evidence, they still believe what the promoters tell them. It won't be hard for these men to do as thousands have done before them, find a lawyer—not an honest one—who will take their money and make encouraging reports to them as long as their money lasts.

The heir schemes are being built up again. Not a week, and hardly a day, passes that some New York public official—the district attorney, the surrogate, the public administrator—doesn't receive one or more inquiries about some mythical "undistributed" estate reputedly worth millions, and officials in other cities are pestered in the same way.

You don't have to be a direct heir in order to participate. The scheming promoters have devised a simple little plan to include all the gulls. They claim to be in touch with a direct heir to the estate who hasn't sufficient money to prove his rights and who is willing to sell participating interests in his claim at so much per share. The more shares you buy the more money you will be entitled to receive when the estate is settled.

There are no "undistributed" estates either in this country or abroad but occasionally some legitimate fortune such as the Wendell estate in New York or the Garrett estate in Philadelphia makes the front page and stimulates public interest in the phonies. Some of the more notorious of the latter—many of them still being promoted—are:

ANNEKE JANS BOGARDUS. Claims much of the property now owned by Trinity Church in New York City. There have been numerous suits, one defended by Aaron Burr, disbarment of lawyers handling claims and prosecutions of numerous promoters.

DRAKE ESTATE. Claims property of Sir Francis Drake. The principal promoter of this scheme, Oscar Hartzell, collected more than \$1,250,000 before he was convicted and sent to Leavenworth Prison.

BAKER ESTATE. Claims 11,000 acres in Pennsylvania supposed to have been owned by Jacob Baker. Some promoters convicted in Philadelphia in 1937.

HENRY GARNER ESTATE. Claims 40 acres in downtown St. Louis. Memberships sold for \$50 each.

PATENTEES OF NEW HARLEM. Claims 2500 acres of land in Harlem (New York City), estimated value \$2,000,000,000. Some of the promoters convicted in Detroit in 1936.

EDWARDS ESTATE. (Referred to above.) In 1891 the Kansas City Times published the following: "The Edwards heirs from all over the country will hold a convention at Cincinnati next week if a large enough hall can be hired, to decide on measures to ob-

tain many million dollars worth of property in both uptown and downtown New York. It is asserted the present owners have no genuine title." That was nearly fifty years ago and the racket still goes on despite the conviction of promoters in various parts of the country.

DURKEE ESTATE. Claims \$64,000,000 in bonds deposited in the United States treasury, but the treasurer of the United States says it isn't so—and he ought to know.

CHARLES WHITE alias LEBLANC. A Canadian fraud. Although court records prove this estate was settled in 1828 the swindle continues.

EMERICH ESTATE. Claims half a billion dollars left in trust with John Jacob Astor by John Nicholas Emerich, his alleged partner over a century ago.

SPRINGER HEIRS. Seek to recover land, claiming to be heirs by a land grant. Thousands of supposed heirs have donated from \$10 each upward to this unsuccessful cause. The land claimed is the present site of Wilmington, Delaware.

STANSBURY ESTATE. Claim 1400 acres of land in the business section of Baltimore, Maryland, said to have been settled by Luke, Tobias and Abraham Stansbury in 1811.

COVERT HEIRS. Claim that part of Manhattan known as Harlem. This land was supposed to have been settled by two Dutch brothers named Covert but no proof of ownership has been produced.

And so it goes. There are too many of these schemes to list but these will give you the general idea.

FLASH from READERS

THIS week we wanted to have the magazine wrapped in lace, the cover decorated with a big heart lanced by an arrow. You know, the spirit of St. Valentine. But the business office frowned on our suggestion, so we are sulking behind the large bookcase in the corner. If you happen to drop in to see us, that's where you'll find us. But, anyway, will you be our valentine?

Some of these days, when we're feeling mean, we are going to take a reader up on this threat of "bet this never sees the light of day, etc." We have never failed to print a letter yet. Sometimes, space may delay the publication but eventually it is used. How do the rest of you feel about the two-serial problem?

J. W. SELLWOOD

DEAR EDITOR:

In a letter from you yourself about two months ago you notified me of your coming and now present policy of two serials per issue of DFW. I have just read the 1st one and no doubt my last. One serial is *hard* enough to keep up with but two—Ye Gods!

I will bet too that this letter never sees the light of day in the readers' comments section. Now look pal—don't ruin your circulation like so and so (a competitor) did. This was a magazine for whom I used to write.

This should have been on a typewriter for legibility but all I am trying to say is, Why go back to the dark ages of serials? Look at the movies for inspiration.

I am now working on a long short or novelette that embraces in real detective work but is a mystery nevertheless. It is different. Shall I submit it to you later?

My regards to Richard Sale for "Daffy Dill." As for "Candid Jones," he is too tough for either a boarding house steak

or a newspaper cameraman. Sale is a good writer if kept in line.

What distinguishes DFW from imitators is the possibility of actual events in its pages. Don't lose this! The *McBride* stories are O.K. only why have he-men discounting the curves of the all so very voluptuous women? They don't! How do I know? Well I am an ex-athlete, six feet two, two hundred and twenty pounds. I'll take sensitivity to anaemic virtue at any time. So would McBride.

After all, what I have done is complain about the best dime's worth in the detective magazine field. All I really ask is this: Only one serial pul-eeze if you must have one, or none if you are really smart.

Let DFW reign as tops. Two serials won't help. Poll your readers if you don't believe. Come on, DFW. I'm with you. Make all your stories new. No serials. No reprints. Keep faith with your readers and prosper.

NEW YORK CITY

What, no complaints in our next letter! We handed this letter to The Man At The Next Desk and sneered while he read it. Afterwards, we chuckled at the sight of Hamilcar, the Argosy pixie, trying to hide his shame in an inkwell.

F. BRIGHAM

DEAR EDITOR:

You evidently concur with me that E. S. Gardner is tops along with Max Brand—for wide versatility in plots, consistency in characters, while their linguistic abilities are superb. Keep them on your payroll—they are individuals you don't need to worry about using. Silenced Revolvers or auto's of large caliber that can't be silenced. I've read your ARGOSY since All-Story days, but you're running too many serials so have had to give it up. Your policy on DOUBLE DETECTIVE and DETECTIVE FICTION seems to be a compromise and Cleve Adams who occasionally gets *Rex McBride* operating at his best, seems doing all right in Honolulu that's just started.

CHICAGO, ILL.

Solving Cipher Secrets



SUNYAM

A CIPHER is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.

No. 43—Biographical Facts. By Madison.

*SUKGSU *BZFRPLSEKL, KDG TPGFE HGUFPULE, BZF Z
*TUVUGZOPFE PL HKOPEPXF, KT ERU *UHPFXKHZOPZL
TZPER, ZLV ZL *ULSOPFRNZL YA ZLXUFEGA.

No. 44—Fair and Warmer. By Agnes Adams.

LYR *BVZLY NU VERY, ONLY NLU NAR GBT NLU UBVO, XHL
*KSVZNTG'U XRLLRZ, OYRZR VZGBDRU DZVO; OYRZR UVBD
XNZTU GZR UNBDNBD NB PVUU-AVQRZRT LZRRU; OYRZF
CRZKHPRU GZR OGKLRT XJ KSVORZ-UARBLRT XZRRFR!

No. 45—Cryptic Routine. By Retlaw.

ILBZ LOR IXIDE BTFZID JZUSAR CI LYIHFYIR, PTDJY, PDUH
JBDSYTOE; JIBUOR, CE PDINSIOBE. BZIBG IORTOKJ, XUVIAJ,
DIXIDJLAJ, LOR VZLY ZLXI EUS.

No. 46—Cerulean Sea. By Saylore.

ABCDE FGAHKLN OPGK RLEBRBPFFPROE NSRPFDAABCDEN
NERT NUVXRPY; BKZBLCS RCRBLNE AGOEK KBNE NEPRER,
ZPGYHFS ZDGNZDGPSNFSLE TAHF; EDSL NXSSZ BLEG YSSZ
TAHS, EGXRPY YBNERLE NERPN. CGPCSGHN NBCDE!

No. 47—Just Trying to Buy. By †Papauli.

OPULGLAN NYSSPX OLAPNO RTORGN *VYBYPPYT ZYIYYG;
HYDROPLANES PTWAPGRN YZLAO FYDAAU NBRKRG, NLA-
FRTPG NKLLT, JPHON. NVGRBX URGDVYTO XLAZERN KGP-
DRN. QLMRG, TLTKEANRK, RCPON RUKOS-VYTXRX.

KRYPTON'S No. X-85, this week's special cipher, is ostensibly a note from one undercover agent to another, concerning projected operations by a hostile foreign power. The cipher system employs a variable key, as described herewith, using a key-number previously agreed upon by the communicating parties. Find the key, unlock the cipher, and read the message!

No. X-85. Numerical-Key Cipher. By Krypton.

PCW BKFVY IET ZJQSSBJE
XIIY B WFKWFX CIXF MT
BT CI FAYBFMQXIIE IY BR
JAQBRE QS ULJA QPGBTNUC
GWW ISTBNMI NQSF PBGNOK
BVI TYCUFSMOM FDXJDNUC
JV YIITM BBXFZX.

The system here involved is popularly known as the Gronsfeld, being identical in type with the cipher used by Jules Verne in his "Giant Raft." To encipher, write the digits of the selected key, in order, and repeated as required, under the message letters. Then count forward in the alphabet for each letter, according to its individual key-digit. Thus, in the illustration, with 3175 as the key, the 3rd letter after "a" is D; the 1st after "n" is O; etc.

Message:	A n s w e r n o w .
Key:	3 1 7 5 3 1 7 5 3 .
Cipher:	D O Z B H S U T Z .

While this cipher can be solved mathematically even if the message is in an unknown language, it can also be broken by trying probable words for cipher groups, remembering that no letter can be signified by a symbol more than 9 places ahead in the alphabet. Having hit upon a word in this way, apply the resulting tentative key-series throughout the message. Probable letter-sequences at some regular interval will show the key-length. Missing letters can then be supplied in words, completing the key. Full explanation of No. X-85 will appear in two weeks.

Restating †P. H. T.'s "Check Problem," No. X-84 of Feb. 10: A teller, cashing a check, by mistake interchanged the dollars and cents. The man spent \$3.50, and then had twice as much money left as he should have had to start with. What was the amount of the check?—Answer: The check was for \$14.32. The teller gave the man \$32.14, which, minus the \$3.50, left \$28.64, twice the actual amount of the check.

Current Crypts: In No. 43, try for the 2nd word, through Z, ZL, and ZLV, noting BZF and PL. In No. 44, identify OYRZR, ONLY, and NLU, checking with LZRRU. In No. 45, guess LOR (after word series), then look to IORTOKJ. In No. 46, ending -ERLE will help with BLEG and RCRBLNE. In No. 47, par 200 solutions, note the doubled symbols, and

their order in HYDROPLANES. By the way, fans, Mono Verde's "Drunken Brethren," No. 281 of last Nov. 25, par 200, netted just 267 solutions! The key to No. 48 runs, 012345 6789. Answers to Nos. 43-48, next week!

No. 48—Cryptic Division. By †Ian.

GWN) IHSWTB(SII
IGOI

ONT
NWH

ORB
NWH

RS

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

37—The average star is said to weigh the tenth to the twenty-eighth power times the weight of an average man, who in turn weighs the tenth to the twenty-seventh times the average atom.

38—Quaint Saint, whose vogue we celebrate
When wintry boughs bear icy weight,
Thou tokenest love, warmth, every-
thing
Befitting harbinger of spring.

39—McGuffey wrote his famous readers in Oxford, Ohio. Spencer first taught his well-known writing system near Geneva, Ohio. Ray wrote his widely used arithmetic in Cincinnati, Ohio.

40—Plutocratic interstate potash magnate dies intestate. Left with scant funds until probate, indigent relict meantime washes windows.

41—Neighboring gathering, wayfaring ring, enduring, shivering, forbearing murmuring, bring stirring picturing, during tiring, lingering showering, averring cheering, alluring spring flowering!

42—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
 ORGAN TUBES

All answers to Nos. 43-48 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for February. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Mental Poisoning!

Thoughts that Enslave Minds

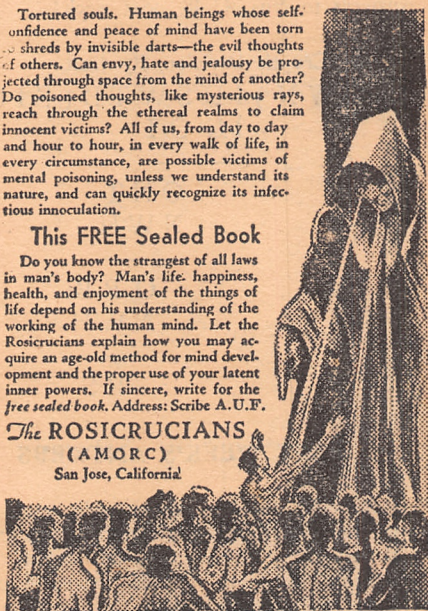
Tortured souls. Human beings whose self-confidence and peace of mind have been torn to shreds by invisible darts—the evil thoughts of others. Can envy, hate and jealousy be projected through space from the mind of another? Do poisoned thoughts, like mysterious rays, reach through the ethereal realms to claim innocent victims? All of us, from day to day and hour to hour, in every walk of life, in every circumstance, are possible victims of mental poisoning, unless we understand its nature, and can quickly recognize its infectious inoculation.

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